

LIFE AT

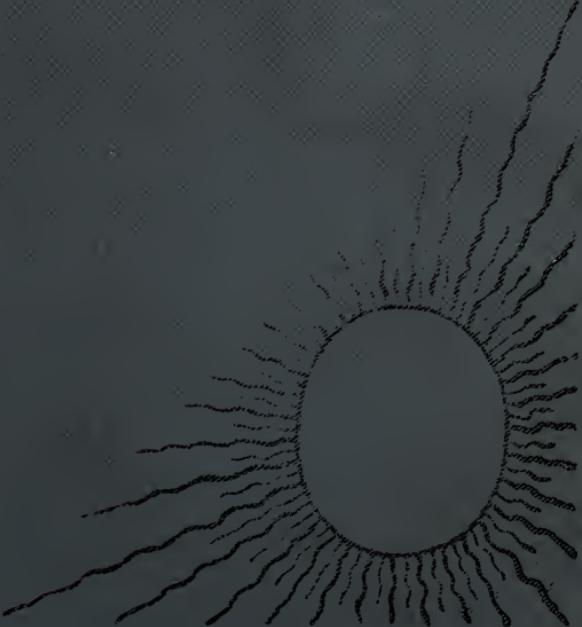
SHUT-IN VALLEY

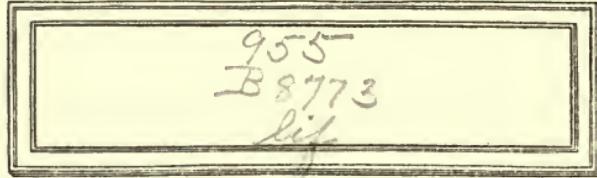
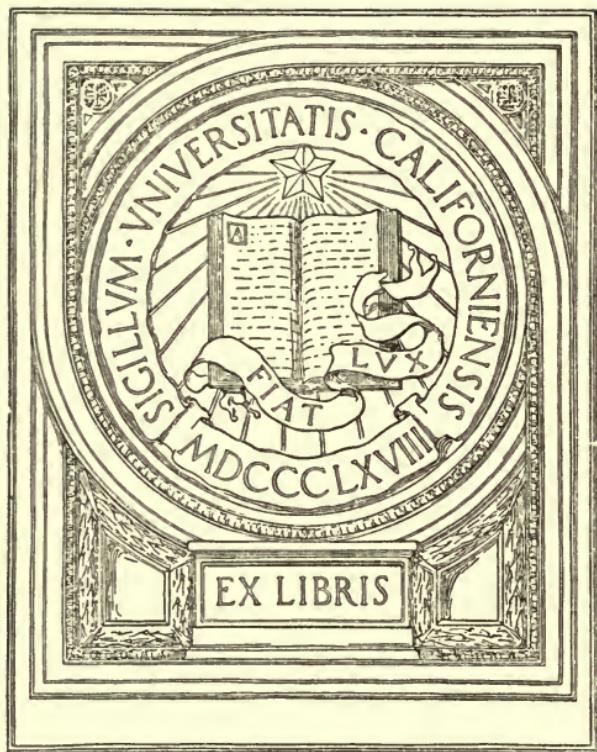
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BY CLARA SPALDING BROWN.





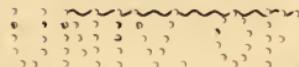
LIFE

— AT —

SHUT-IN VALLEY

AND OTHER

PACIFIC COAST TALES.



BY

CLARA SPALDING BROWN.

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*To the Memory of
My Brothers,
Two of Nature's Noblemen.*

LIFE AT SHUT-IN VALLEY.

SHUT-IN VALLEY lay bathed in sunlight—the bright, intense sunlight of California, that burns and crisps but does not wilt. Down the white, winding road a cloud of dust betokened the swift gallop of a stray horseman—some hunter, probably, or a visitor from the town, twenty-five miles away, to one of the ranches still farther up the mountains. No further sign of life was manifest, save in the doorway of a low, weather-beaten cabin at the extreme lower end of the valley, where a young woman in a plain calico gown stood, with her deep blue eyes wearily scanning the landscape. Not even the rude and uninviting setting of this living picture could detract from its plainly apparent claim to more than ordinary interest. It was a graceful figure and a high-bred face—delicate, sensitive, full of intelligence and refinement, of sadness, too, as its owner slowly turned away and disappeared from sight.

“What a life!” Marian Curtis was saying in her heart. “How can I endure it?”

Five years ago this solitary woman had been a

successful teacher in a bustling New England town. A town not too large for sociability and genuine enjoyment, but far removed from the dullness and utter isolation of her present life. She had been well known, respected, admired, had possessed the means to gratify, in moderation, her æsthetic tastes and to preserve an innate fastidiousness in regard to apparel and surroundings. When Harvey Curtis, a prepossessing young man, from what the Coolville people denominated "the West" (albeit the territory in this case was the State of Indiana), came to visit his sister in her Yankee home, and without much loss of time proceeded to court the pretty teacher who chanced to be boarding in the house, grumblings suppressed but heartfelt were heard among the eligible masculines native to the town. Miss Hunter had no fortune at her command, and even "worked for a living," yet more than one appreciative resident had been known to declare her "a prize for any man;" and it certainly was Miss Hunter's own fault that she had not, ere this, exchanged her school of forty roguish, restless pupils for one very different in requirements.

She abdicated at last, in favor of this black-browed, broad-shouldered man of thirty, whose strong will and passionate devotion swept away every objection. And for a year after their marriage she was

happy. Harvey was fond and proud of his gentle young wife, his means were amply sufficient for their wants, and the current of life flowed smoothly. If Marian at times noticed little things that jarred upon her finer nature, was now and then sensible of an indescribable disappointment, the momentary unpleasantness was so speedily followed by a contrasting impression that she gave no deep thought to the matter, but dismissed the subject with the reflection that men were not like women, and doubtless she had expected more than she had a right to enjoy.

Then Harvey took the California fever. At first Marian could not bear to hear him talk about it. She was one of those who can not lightly break home ties, and her heart fainted within her when she contemplated what her situation would be, far out on that strange Pacific Coast, where no dear familiar features, save her husband's, could ever meet her eye, and the great distance and expense of the journey across the continent would forbid visits to the "old folks at home." But Harvey had the fever hard and strong. His mind was really set upon going, and the winter being an unusually severe and changeable one, Marian, never very robust, began to cough.

"That settles it, Marian," declared Harvey; "you must go. I can't let consumption get hold of you." Even Marian's relatives thought it best, and the up-

shot of it all was that just as the June roses were bursting into bloom, and the bright-breasted robins were twittering gaily in the cherry trees, she bade a sorrowful good-bye to the old haunts she loved so well and turned her face as bravely as might be toward the setting sun. "I have my husband," she thought, trying to dispel the dark cloud over her spirits; "I can be happy with him anywhere. California must be a lovely place; we shall soon make friends, and all will be well."

In due time the tedious, though interesting journey was accomplished, and after a brief survey of San Francisco the couple took passage on the *Ancon* for San Diego. Here Harvey had an acquaintance, and the climate being recommended as just the thing for his wife, here he proposed to establish a home in some way to be determined upon after inspection of the place. He found the town smaller than he had anticipated, with no promising openings for business, San Diego being a sufferer at that time from the unkept promises of the Texas & Pacific Railway Company. Several months passed in looking over the ground, and finally Harvey determined to buy a ranch—the best thing he could do, people said. Plant it in wheat and he could have an income the very first year, besides raising his own garden stuff, having plenty of fresh eggs and milk and butter,

even honey, as most of the ranchers in the mountains had at least a few stands of bees Marian was soon induced to give her consent. She was not fond of farm life, as she knew it in the East, and she was averse to removing so far away from any settlement; but there would be compensations which she hoped would make life enjoyable in spite of all that she disliked. The novelty of ranch life in this new country was interesting, the climate was delightful and the scenery grand.

So the bargain was struck, and the Curtises moved out to their new home in season to prepare the ground for the winter seeding. Harvey had visited the ranch several times, but Marian had never accompanied him. It was a long, rough road, up narrow cañons, down steep mountain grades and across fertile little valleys occupied by one or two small houses, to the spot which had taken Harvey's fancy; and, as Marian had not been feeling at all well, she had contented herself with listening attentively to her husband's eulogies of the place, and had decided that if he found it satisfactory, with his superior knowledge of what was requisite in a ranch, she would like it very well. There was a house to live in, she knew that, for the place had been occupied by a man with quite a large family, and there would be nothing to do but go right on

with the management of the ranch—so much easier than to start on an unimproved place. It was near nightfall when their tired horses ascended the rough grade that led up to Shut-in-Valley, and Marian understood the name with a new significance, as she beheld the narrow opening between two great masses of rock and earth that formed the only means of access to the valley from the direction of San Diego; and later realized that there was only one way out—at the other end—a still more tortuous and precipitous path than the one toward town, leading only to some lonely valleys on a higher level. She never got over the impression of prison walls that those rugged, inclosing mountains gave her. They were grand in their outlines, beautiful often in their changing lights and shadows, but they confined a restless soul, imposed insurmountable barriers between her and what her heart held dear.

She could scarcely believe her eyes when they stopped before a rude, unpainted cabin beside the road, a large chimney of stones standing conspicuously at one end, and Harvey laughingly told her that this was "home." In her wildest flights of fancy she had never dreamed of occupying a structure like that—why, it was no better than a lumberman's shanty in the Maine pine woods, or than her father's woodshed—not half so good as the barns of her own

country. Harvey was amused by her crest-fallen countenance. "Looks rather rough, don't it, Marie? But what do we care—we'll enjoy ranching just the same, and after the first harvest we'll have a new house."

Harvey did "enjoy ranching;" he developed more and more a taste for out-door pursuits, was interested heart and soul in the improvement and progress of the place, and often declared that he didn't know what true enjoyment was until he came to California—he wouldn't go back East for all the farms in the country. But strangely enough, all the improvements were confined to the fields, stock, agricultural implements, etc. The first harvest and yet another, passed successfully by; the yield being good on these upper levels, even when nearly a failure in drier localities, and the quality of the wheat being so good that the crop was readily engaged at a fair price by the managers of the flour mill in San Diego. Yet there was no "new house." It took Harvey but a few days to adapt himself to circumstances, as men can so much more readily than women, and he soon forgot that any changes were desirable. Alas! that I must say it, but Marian had a grievance much worse than this; he also forgot, gradually but surely, to give his wife those demonstrations of affection always needed by a sensitive, sympathetic-natured woman, and doubly called for in a situation like Marian's.

He was happy and content, and he forgot that he had taken his wife away from all her people to associations that were repugnant. He was engrossed in his ranch work, and he forgot that his wife was wearing her heart out in loneliness and lack of anything to satisfy her soul hunger. It suited him to find the unsightly cabin as neat as soap and water could make it, and well-cooked meals upon the long table that did duty for master and mistress, Mexican and Indian "hands" alike; to see Marian moving about with her graceful step, and face flushed with the warm air of the kitchen; and he forgot that "man's love is of his life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole existence."

And so he starved her. Yes, I say he starved her! If he had withheld the food necessary to sustain her drooping body, would not judge and jury have solemnly asserted his guilt in not providing sustenance? What is the body compared to that mysterious marvel, that breath of life, termed the soul? And if all that feeds and nourishes this finest, most essential part of humanity is taken away, what ensues but starvation? In the great recording book, kept by the angels, is marked down case after case of man's injustice and shortcoming on points that never come before a mortal tribunal.

Marian Curtis was not a feeble-minded woman,

nor one inclined to fretful complaints. One by one she gave up her cherished hopes and stoutly held on to what was left, until she could no longer avoid seeing that the glamour of sentiment existing for a brief period after their union had entirely passed away from her husband. She tried not to doubt his affection for her, but something was lacking—something so very vital that each day was a renewed disappointment, and her unhappiness constantly increased. She did not let him go without a struggle. Longing for a tender caress, anxious to show her depth of love, she often laid her arm about his neck, or paused to give him a gentle kiss, only to be pained afresh by the carelessness with which her endearments were received. There was no more heart talk between them, no quick responsiveness of the soul. Harvey was seldom cross with her, though inconsiderate frequently. The trouble was that she was simply a *housekeeper*.

What had she to atone for her deprivations? The nearest postoffice or church was at San Diego; there were no neighbors within a mile on either hand. The first one toward town conducted an apiary, and was a crusty old bachelor, who seldom showed his face in Shut-in-Valley. The nearest one in the other direction was a soured, ignorant man, whose wife had left him, and who spent his time pattering over a small ranch

in the valley above. There was nothing fresh to read, except an occasional package of papers well out of date by the time they were obtained from the post-office.

She could not ride, for the horses were always busy in the fields, hauling wood from the mountain side, or on the road to town with a heavy load. She soon tired of walking up and down the one white road of the valley, bordered on either side by waving wheat and barley; and she missed the beautiful clumps of live-oak trees that had been felled to give place to the monotonous stretch of grain. The original owner of the ranch had apparently taken considerable pains to build the shelter that served him for a home, as remote as possible from any shade except that cast upon it by the overhanging heights when the sun was still high in the heavens, where it remained with its chilling influence until a new day was far advanced. Marian did not object to the cold nights, but welcomed the creeping shadow as a relief from the intensity of the mid-day heat which fell unobstructed upon the frail cabin. The first time that she yielded to a passionate desire to scale what she grew to consider her "prison walls," and see what lay beyond, she was so terror-stricken by the sight of a great rattlesnake lying across her path that she never ventured again. And so her life became hemmed in until the exasperated

spirit beat exhaustingly against the earthly frame that confined it, and, unnoticed by her busy husband, Marian failed daily. Not in the way that had been apprehended when she left the East, for the health-giving atmosphere of California had long ago cured the incipient cough, but in a puzzling, almost imperceptible manner that would have occasioned anxiety on the part of a close observer.

One day Harvey and his crew of swarthy-hued "hands" came flocking into the long, low kitchen and found no supper ready. Astonished search in every nook of the limited quarters revealed no wife. She couldn't have "gone a-gaddin'," like housewives in thickly settled communities, and it wasn't like her to remain away from her post for any cause. Harvey went out to the road and shouted at the top of his lungs. Nothing but an echo answered him.

Beginning to be alarmed, he sent the men out in various directions to look for Marian, taking himself the winding road that led down the cañon to Simms' apiary; here were trees and, at this season, bright flowers in the cañon, and possibly Marian had gone thither to gather a bouquet, and had met with some mishap. He had not walked far when he heard some one shouting for him to return. "Oh, she has come," he said to himself. "What a simpleton I was to get frightened about nothing."

"Sacaton has found her, down by the pool," said his up-valley neighbor, "old Miggs," who was helping Curtis harvest his wheat.

"Wh-what's the matter?" stammered the now thoroughly aroused husband, striding post-haste along the diminutive stream that flowed at the rear of the cabin, to where it fell half a dozen feet and widened into a shallow basin fringed with willows. It was the one spot in all the neighborhood that reminded Marian of New England, and she often sat dreamily watching the water as it trickled over the mossy stones, and listened to its music while it flowed onward to the gentle Sweet Water, far below Shut-in-Valley, thence to be carried to the mighty Pacific.

Sacaton—one of the half-breeds—had sometimes seen her sitting there, and at once sought the pool, to find a white-faced woman lying prone upon the ground, as oblivious to what was passing around her as the dead. Harvey Curtis did not know but that she was dead when he caught sight of that inanimate face, and noted the needle-work at her feet. No one could look at that drawn countenance and fancy its owner sleeping. What could it be? She had made no complaints at noon, hadn't said much, anyway, Harvey remembered vaguely, but seemed about as usual. "As usual!" how many heart-breaks are covered by that stereotyped phrase!

"My God!" he cried, ere he fairly reached his wife, "old Miggs" scrambling after and the half-breeds gathering around in respectful solicitude. "Do you suppose a rattler has struck her?" Harvey raised the light figure and gazed widely into the pallid face. "No," asserted Miggs; "that ain't no snake bite. She'd be all swoll'd up an' blacker'n a thunder cloud. She's swounded."

It was such a swoon as Harvey had never seen before. He worked long and vainly to restore consciousness after he laid Marian upon her bed, while Sacaton urged the best horse in the corral to its fleetest speed, commissioned to summon the first physician that could be induced to go so far from San Diego.

When at last her eyelids fluttered and opened for an instant, Harvey's heart went out in a cry of "Marian, darling!" But there was no gleam of responding love in the large eyes, the nerveless hand lay passively in his clasp. A sigh of utter weariness, and again the lids were closed, only the feeble, irregular breath testifying that some faint consciousness remained. She did not rouse much during the night. At daybreak a physician arrived, guided along the dangerous grades by the faithful Sacaton. He remained with his patient until after noon, and talked scientifically about "nervous prostration," "collapse

of the vital forces," etc., expressing his belief that she would "pull through" with careful nursing; it wasn't medicine she needed so much as rest and tender care. He would send out Miss —, the best nurse in the town and a creditable nurse for any town, and she'd build Mrs. Curtis right up. "So chirk up, man," the doctor cried cheerfully, mounting his tall, white horse. "She's down flat, sure enough, but 'tisn't as though she was wild with fever or gone with some organic disease. There's been too much strain upon her, and she's given away, that's all."

Harvey did not seem to understand the doctor's reasoning. He had not been aware of any particular strain—thought, on the whole, Marian had an easier time of it than he did. To be sure, she wasn't weaned from New England yet and she was lonesome sometimes, but that didn't seem sufficient to account for such a crisis. He was destined to comprehend in some measure what his wife had passed through, in the next two weeks; for, although the nurse came at once and took up her duties with the skill of a master hand, Harvey was too anxious about this new, strange being, that was a very wraith of the old Marian, to stay away from her long, and in her weakness and but partial sensibility words dropped from her lips that had never before found utterance. She moaned about the "old times," the gray-haired father and mother,

the sweet-scented forests and murmuring streams of loved "Yankee-land." She hopelessly referred to their life in Shut-in-Valley and said it was not worth the struggle and that she did not want to live.

One day Harvey sat beside her, thinking very intently of her broken sentences, and questioning if he had really been blind to what should have been his dearest interest. Marian suddenly opened her eyes and as suddenly spoke out, more clearly and forcibly than since her illness began. "Why did you stop loving me?" she queried.

Harvey stared at her in amazement. "My dear, what a strange question! I love you with all my heart."

"No you don't," Marian persisted querulously; "if you did you'd show it. I'm tired of being a machine, to plod along here without any heart or soul. I want to be petted sometimes and cared for, and treated as if nobody could take my place. I didn't think *this* was what you married me for." She could say no more; her momentary strength was gone, and she lay sobbing childishly, heedless of his attempts to comfort her, his earnest assertion that no one ever *could* take her place.

The nurse came in and ordered him away, but he took with him a host of disturbing thoughts, and for several days went around in silence, until he

acknowledged himself guilty of much that his wife had alleged. Brought face to face with the possibility of losing her, he realized how valueless everything else in life was, after all, compared with her, and resolved that he would begin at once to do all that lay in his power to obliterate the impressions of the past years. Dormant emotions now rose triumphant over all that had previously actuated him, and in his courting days he had not felt more anxious to win Marian's favor than now that she lay a wreck of her former self in that little cabin at Shut-in-Valley. It was difficult at first to convince her of his affection and penitence for the past. She did not appear to hear half that he said, and laughed scornfully when he did gain her attention. But as she improved in mind and body, she noticed that a strong arm was ready to support her, a kind voice soothed her when she was restless, and soft kisses frequently fell upon her brow. Gradually a sense of happiness, of satisfaction, stole into her heart. Her eyes grew bright, her cheeks flushed faintly as she gazed upon her husband's face and saw the light of love there. The incubus that had rested upon her rolled away and dissolved like a vapor. It was worth while to be sick, she thought, just to lie there and be made much of, like an overgrown baby.

This was several years ago. San Diego is a

thriving place now, and growing rapidly. The country is settled up with intelligent farmers. Many a beautiful home is nestled amid fragrant orange trees and surrounded by a wealth of exquisite flowers. Shut-in-Valley has not changed in appearance much, on the whole, yet there have been many improvements. The old cabin has disappeared. Shaded by graceful pepper trees, stands a pretty cottage with broad verandas covered with clinging vines and a profusion of roses. All around are fruit trees of many varieties. Within are dainty rooms, a small piano, and a goodly number of books and periodicals. Out in the stable a sturdy Indian pony is munching his barley, preparatory to taking his mistress on a long jaunt over the hills. A veritable little cay-euse is he—trustworthy on the steepest trails and fond of following Marian about when allowed to go loose. Marian is not unhappy now, even on this secluded ranch. She does not expect to live there always, and in many ways she and Harvey contrive to bring diversion and pleasure into their routine of existence. Though Harvey is not so well constituted as some men, perhaps, to discern the inmost recesses of her nature, he is true and honest and loving, and finds it so pleasant to demonstrate his affection for Marian's pleasure that he could no longer be happy himself without so doing.

"After all, life in Shut in-Valley is real enjoyable," said Marian, the other day, as they galloped down the road to the cottage and a bevy of excited dogs rushed to greet them. "I just love these grand old mountains now, and when father and mother come out next winter they'll hardly know me, I've grown so well and—yes, so *brown*, 'a-ranching it.' Won't it be nice if we can induce them to stay?"



A STRIKE FOR EIGHT HOURS.

"THE carpenters struck for eight hours to-night, Martha. There'll be no more work done till the builders come to our terms."

Mrs. Dayton looked across the table at her husband, with a dubious expression on her face.

"Do you think they will give in? I am afraid you will be out of work some time."

"I don't care if I am; eight hours are enough for anybody to work, and it's time the people who have to do the labor of this world showed some spunk and rebelled against being tied down to one eternal grind."

"But you will lose three dollars a day, and we don't want to run in debt. Mouths must be fed, you know, just the same, and the children's shoes—"

"There you go, borrowing trouble right and left! What's the use of trying to cross a bridge before you come to it? I guess there will be a way provided."

Mrs. Dayton said no more, but she looked anxious as she cleared away the tea things, put the children to bed, and finally sat down to a big basket of mending, just as her husband's snores began to pene-

trate the sitting-room from the adjoining bedroom. She was very tired, but she could not think of going to bed before 11 o'clock. There was always just so much to be done, and only one pair of hands to do it all.

Eight hours a day's work! Mrs. Dayton smiled grimly. What would become of the work in that house if *she* "rebelled against being tied down to one eternal grind?" Six children, the eldest but twelve years of age, the youngest an ailing baby whom she sometimes feared did not receive due attention, with so many other cares devolving upon her from early morning until late at night; and Mrs. Dayton was not robust--never had been. She could not "turn off" her work as some women do, but she did the best she could, without complaining.

"If Silas has made up his mind not to go back to work, nothing I can say will change it," she mused. "There's one good thing about it—if he is going to be at home, he can help me in a number of ways."

Comforted a little by this reflection, she plied her needle with renewed vigor, and at last crept wearily into bed, partially arousing her husband, who muttered, testily, "Don't talk to me! I tell you, eight hours are enough," then turned over and started a new series of snores.

"Do you mind holding baby a few minutes,

Silas, while I skim the milk?" queried Mrs. Dayton, after breakfast the next morning.

Silas had settled himself into his chair with the air of a man who has all day before him and owns no man for a master.

"Hold baby!" he ejaculated. "Do you think I'm here to do women's work? I guess when I get a day off I'm going to enjoy it."

"He's sick with a tooth coming through, or I shouldn't have asked it. I really don't know how I can attend to my work and care for him as I ought. There, there, poor little dear, don't cry."

"Well, if this is the sort of racket I've got to listen to, I'll clear out. Great Scott! just hear him yell! I thought I was going to have a little peace in my own house. You needn't wait dinner for me—I don't know when I'll get back."

The irate man hurriedly got out his fishing tackle and strode off to the nearest wharf. The Daytons lived on the outskirts of a large seaport, had their own little cottage, a cow and chickens, and were altogether very pleasantly situated. Mr. Dayton was a good husband in most respects, and would have stared in amazement if any one had suggested that he was not always perfectly kind to his wife. He was thoughtless, like many other men who do not stop to consider how manifold the duties of a housekeeper are. He

would have scouted the notion that his wife worked harder than he did, and the idea of lightening her burdens in any way had never occurred to him.

Mrs. Dayton had trained her children to be useful to some extent, but the oldest was a boy, and his ten-year-old sister could only render some assistance in dressing the little ones mornings, and do a few chores after school at night. The week passed by, and Mrs. Dayton was disappointed in her hope of deriving any benefit from her husband's idleness. If she asked him to repair something about the house he would do it to-morrow, but to-morrow came and it was not done. When churning-time came he was not to be found. He never seemed to notice when she lifted heavy kettles of water or emptied the wash-tubs, and she strained her arms as usual putting up the clothes-line. Seeing how disinclined he was to have anything to do with the domestic affairs, she ceased asking for his help.

Silas Dayton was enjoying his vacation. He was a good workman and he meant to make the most of his leisure; so he read and he smoked, took naps in the hammock and indulged in long gossips over the fence with neighbor Jones, a professional man whose office hours were short. Did you ever notice how fond the average man is of gossip? He likes to have his fling about the chattering of women, but at heart

he relishes a bit of news. When Almira Smith becomes engaged to be married, or her father sells his pasture lot, or Jim Downs gets a clerkship in a store, he is always glad to hear about it, and two men can beat any two women of my acquaintance in holding a protracted sidewalk meeting.

Martha Dayton lay awake nights and thought. Saturday morning she arose with an unaccustomed look of determination on her face. In a way that ordinarily mild women sometimes have, she had suddenly become firm as a rock in her resolution to adopt a new course of conduct. "I'll begin at 6 o'clock," she said to herself. The work was accomplished magically that day; every step was made to count, every minute was used to advantage. By 3 o'clock the house was in order and a generous baking adorned the pantry shelves.

Half an hour later Mr. Dayton came in and found his wife sitting in the parlor, with her new gingham dress on, reading the morning paper, while the baby crowded on a rug at her feet.

"Expecting company?" he inquired.

"No, I'm just resting."

It was something new for Martha Dayton to be "resting" in the daytime, and it had been years since she had "fixed up" like that, except on the rare occasions when she went out somewhere.

When the supper was served, Mr. Dayton missed some of the usual accessories of the meal. No hot biscuit, no baked potatoes or nicely broiled chops--nothing warm but the tea, which had been made on the oil stove.

"How's this?" he grumbled. "Ain't you cutting us short to-night with your cold victuals? I like a hot supper."

"Oh, I've struck," replied Mrs. Dayton in a serio-comic tone. "I've come to your conclusion that eight hours are enough for any one to work, and that it is time to rebel against an eternal grind. It will necessitate some changes, but since you are firmly convinced of the right of the matter, of course you will be willing to put up with the inconvenience of it, as I have to with the loss of your wages on account of the same principle." That was a long speech for Martha Dayton to make. Silas glared at her with open mouth. She looked smiling and at ease, not at all as if she were bereft of her senses. It wasn't like her to joke, but she must be "funning" now. Trying to be smart, eh? He didn't quite like it.

"What rigmarole are you getting off now?" he said rather roughly. "If you took a lazy streak and didn't want to cook a good supper, why don't you come right out and say so, not throw up that eight-

hour business to me? Man's work isn't woman's work. You just attend to your cooking and baby-tending, and I'll see to my carpentering."

" You think I don't mean it, Silas, but I do. My work is just as hard as yours, and more wearing to the nerves. Hereafter I shall consider eight hours of constant labor a day's work, and outside of that I shall do only what can not be avoided. A woman needs time for rest and recreation just as much as a man does, and the way I have been living it has been impossible to be anything more than a mere house-keeping machine. I should like to improve my mind a little."

" You ain't turning woman suffragist, I hope. I'll bet that Miss Skinner has been talking to you." Miss Skinner was a somewhat noted platform speaker who lived near the Daytons.

" No one has been talking to me, and this has nothing to do with suffrage. It seems that when you said ' people ' you meant ' men,' giving no thought to women; but I fail to see why they should not be included in the labor question."

Mrs. Dayton had not been a self-assertive woman, and her husband gave but little thought to her unexpected outbreak. He attributed it to a "cantankerous spell" which would not last long. A strike of housekeepers! Refusal to work more than eight

hours a day! It was absurd, ridiculous. I am not sure but Silas Dayton went farther in his thoughts and pronounced it *lazy*; for what did woman's work amount to, anyhow, compared to the hard tussles of a man with the world?

The subject was not mentioned the next morning, when they partook of the usual Sunday breakfast of beans and brown bread. Mr. Dayton, who was not in the habit of attending church, started out for a stroll about town. Mrs. Dayton very seldom went, as she generally had a baby too small to leave. To please Silas, it was her custom to prepare the most bountiful meal of the week for Sunday afternoon, and the day of rest often left her so fatigued that it was an effort to begin anew on Monday morning. If any one called, she was not fit to receive them in her working garb and with her heated face.

It was nearly three o'clock when Silas returned. "Who has he brought home now?" wondered the little woman as she heard strange voices. Silas often brought people home with him to the Sunday dinner; he was hospitable, and he knew that there would be an abundance of good things to eat.

"I ran across my old friend Jabez Hunter and his wife," he explained, as Martha went into the front hall. "Haven't seen them for years. They've got a farm only twenty miles from here, it seems, and

they've been to town time and again, and didn't know we were living here."

Martha was shaking hands with a stout, fresh-faced man and a large, comfortable-looking woman, and Jabez was declaring that he knew Si. in a minute, and he was mighty glad to see Si's wife and the babies.

"Si. haint changed hardly any," he continued, "but you ain't lookin' well. Kind o' dragged out, ain't ye? Better come out to the farm; we'll fat you up."

Silas was secretly pleased to see that his wife was neatly dressed, and seemed less "put out" than usual by company. Jabez Hunter had been one of his best friends in the old days, and now that Jabez had the air of being well used by the world, Silas was anxious to have his wife, children and home appear in a favorable light.

Soon Mrs. Dayton called them into the dining-room where the long table was spread, and the children already seated in their places, the baby industriously drumming with a spoon on his waiter. With pride, Silas named his boys and girls, who were embarrassed just enough to make their behavior unobtrusive.

"By George, Si, you're a rich man with such a family as this," exclaimed Jabez. "Don't it do your

heart good to look around and see 'em? I tell Lucy sometimes its pretty lonesome for us out on that big farm where youngsters would have such a good time. Wouldn't you like to go fishing in my trout brook, young man?" addressing Jack, the oldest boy.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, with a broad grin. By this time all were settled, and Silas' face wore a look of blank astonishment and dismay. Cold meat, cold bread, berries, cake and a cold custard pudding.

"My wife, it seems, has made a change in the bill of fare," he finally said ill-humoredly; "we are in the habit of having a good Sunday dinner."

"I don't see anything the matter with this," declared Mrs. Hunter.

"Silas has forgotten that I've struck," said Mrs. Dayton. "I've adopted the eight hour plan, and no unnecessary work on Sunday. Men don't work Sundays—why should women when they can avoid it?"

Silas' face was red with suppressed wrath. A pretty impression of things his friends would get!

Jabez Hunter gazed at Mrs. Dayton admiringly. Given half a chance, she would be a pretty woman.

"What's that?" he chuckled. "Struck? Come now, that's good. Why shouldn't women strike as well as men? I'm sure they have more to put up with. I hain't never let my wife grub all day long and half the night as lots of 'em do. Have I, Lucy?

And Sundays we don't do nothin' at our house that we can git out of."

"Half the time we make our dinner on bread and milk Sundays," said Mrs. Hunter, smilingly. "I'm bound to have one day in the week when I ain't tied to the kitchen."

"Your wife must have a pile of work to do, Si, with all these youngsters; it's enough to make her look peaked. Lucy finds chores enough on the farm, but we hain't no children and I help her considerable. I s'pose you're handy in the house when you're out o' work, ain't ye, Si?"

Silas' face was a study. Mr. Hunter continued, as he took another slice of cold lamb:

"You'd laugh, I expect, to see me with one of Lucy's big aprons on wipin' dishes or turnin' the wringer. I s'pose I do cut a figger, but it reminds me of the time when I used to ketch Lucy unawares a makin' pies or somethin' before we was married, an' she used to git my face all flour behind the pantry door."

"Law, now, Jabez, ain't you ashamed?" Mrs. Hunter's face was rosy.

"I like to think of them old courtin' days, don't you, Si?"

Tears sprang into Mrs. Dayton's eyes; she did not look at her husband. He mumbled an inarticu-

late answer. The children were delighted with the turn of the conversation; such a jolly fellow had not visited them for many a day.

"I made up my mind when I got married that my wife wa'n't goin' to be drove to death. I'd got her an' I meant to take care of her an' keep her. Seems 's though some men took partic'lar pains to git their wives out o' the way so they could git another. I ain't anxious for No. 2. Lucy don't look 's though she was fadin' away, does she? Tipped the scales at one hundred an' ninety-five pounds (stop yer nudgin', Lucy) the other day."

Jabez beamed affectionately on his discomfited spouse, the children tittered and Mrs. Dayton ventured to smile across the table at her unusually silent husband.

"Now, Mrs. Dayton, I don't b'lieve *you* weigh much mor'n a hundred pounds. Looks to me like you was pretty near tired out an' needed a change. Bundle her up, Si, with her babies, an' send her out to the farm. You can git along without her a spell better'n you can spare her for good. I don't b'lieve you want a No. 2 to mother all these youngsters."

Silas found his tongue and a chance to use it at last, and the conversation drifted into other channels. Sooner than any of them desired, the time came when the Hunters were obliged to leave, and the

Daytons were left with the feeling that a warm, invigorating rift of sunshine had been let into their lives. Evidently Silas had " food for thought " that evening, and it was he who lay awake that night, and his wife who slept. When she was ready to begin her washing the next morning, she found her tubs filled with water and the clothes-line ready for use. Volumes could not have told her more than those two simple acts did. In the afternoon, as she sat making aprons for the children, Silas said: " If you want to go out to the farm, Martha, I think likely I can get Mandy Johnson to come and keep house."

" But the children? "

" You can take the baby and Freddy and Stella, and the rest will get along all right going to school here." So it was arranged.

When Mrs. Dayton returned, almost a new woman, she found that a compromise had been effected and Silas was working. She did not attempt to keep up her own strike, but life was henceforward made easier for her. She hired help on extra hard occasions, many little things that had been expected of her were omitted, and Silas, now that his eyes were opened, found that he could save his wife from backaches and help her to get a leisure hour in ways that detracted not a whit from his manliness. The time came when he said to her: " That was a cute

idea of yours, Martha—that strike for eight hours. I was mad at the time, but when I saw how much better Jabez Hunter treated his wife than I did you, it made me feel that maybe I hadn't been doing right ; I guess I think as much of you as he does of Lucy, and I mean to give you as good a show as I can."

"I am satisfied," said Martha, looking lovingly at her husband; "but I was not before my strike. I was really getting vicious. We are lots happier now, aren't we?"

"I only wish all strikes might end as well as yours did."

HEARTS ARE TRUMPS.

MRS. BELKNAP had led a nomadic life since the death of her husband, flitting from place to place as fancy suggested.

Lonely? Yes, but Mrs. Belknap was accustomed to loneliness. She had been lonely as a child in her cheerless country home, and she had been still more lonely as a wife when long miles intervened between her and all the associations of early years, and an impassable gulf separated her husband's soul from her own.

With the large ideality of youth, she had invested the man of her choice with qualities he did not possess; moreover, she was one of those who do not grow into a realization of their capabilities and needs until late in life. Every year took her farther away from her husband and made the void in her life greater. The finer, better part of nature—that which was dearest and most essential to her—was entirely without companionship, in fact was scarcely recognized by him who should have been most appreciative of it. Can woman endure a worse solitude than this? She

tried to bear her lot heroically, and no one knew what bitter waters she passed through ; but she felt that the blessedness of life had never touched her. The hardest of all lessons to learn was resignation ; the utmost fortitude was required for her to face the prospect of never *living* as God knew that she could live.

There was more than this to make her unhappy ; her husband's habits would have justified a divorce, but she shrank from taking legal proceedings against him, and continued on her troubled way until Providence settled the matter by suddenly terminating the earthly career of Mr. Belknap.

The first winter thereafter she spent in Florida, the second found her in California. Early in February she took up her quarters in Los Angeles, where already roses in countless variety were blooming, and long rows of stately callas defied frosts as they upturned their white chalices to the sunny skies.

For some weeks Alice Belknap felt the charm of this genial climate as she walked beneath the overhanging pepper trees, their graceful, ferny branches relieved by clusters of scarlet berries, and noted the beauty all around her. It was a pleasure to breathe the pure, soft air, and night brought a refreshing coolness provocative to slumber. Then gradually the old spirit of unrest came upon her--the old revolt against her destiny. The flower-decked cottage homes,

more than the pretentious mansions, accentuated her own solitariness. She was lonely still.

The only remedy for this condition of mind she had found to be change of scene. "I will go to Santa Monica," she resolved one day; "the sea will suit my mood." She forthwith ensconced herself at the Hotel Arcadia, upon the very edge of the bluff, overlooking a grand curve of shore and sweep of sandy beach. The hotel was fairly filled with guests, who made the house lively with hops and other diversions. Mrs. Belknap might have joined the merry-makers, for she had at her command the "open sesame" to social circles—a generous bank account; but of this fact no one was aware. The greater part of her life had been a struggle with insufficient means, and she knew well how one's best energies are cramped by poverty, how the needs of one's soul are trampled upon by stern necessity, yet she never could become a worshipper of Mammon. Society had but little attraction for her; the intellectual life offered pleasure beyond the ken of devotees of fashion. Literature, art, music—these were things worth living for—if one were not always alone!

It had been a fancy of the widow, as she traveled from place to place, to keep her riches in the background, and win what courtesy and esteem she could solely by her personality. She therefore dressed

plainly and dispensed with luxuries, but she did not forget to quietly assist many an unfortunate person who came in her way. The guests of the Arcadia paid but little attention to the new-comer, though there was some puzzling over her on the part of a few gentlemen who observed the poise of her manner and the inscrutable look in her eyes.

One breezy afternoon Mrs. Belknap was returning from a stroll up the beach, dividing her attention between the incoming tide, which narrowly escaped wetting her feet more than once, and Mrs. Custer's last book. She loved to read of that happy wedded life upon the plains—a perfect illustration of the ease with which true love overcomes obstacles and endures hardship for the sake of remaining near the beloved object. "How rich that faithful little woman was," she thought; "how blest with such a strong, cheery, brave, tender and affectionate nature beside her! What did it matter how or where they lived?"

Her eyes grew moist with sympathy for the dauntless woman's unspeakable loss. A gust of wind fluttered the leaves of her book and something white flew past her eyes. Looking up quickly, she saw slips of paper scattered over the sand and one lying in the edge of the water. In another moment it would be carried out by the receding wave. In a

nook formed by a bend of the bluff, a man was rising to his feet with some difficulty, it appeared, as he leaned upon a stout cane—evidently the scribbler, for more slips lay about him and chagrin was upon his face. Mrs. Belknap deftly secured the soaked paper and had gathered up most of the others by the time the stranger reached her.

"Yours?" she queried, brightly.

"Yes; a thousand times obliged," he replied, as he took them from her. "They are of no great value, still I should be sorry to lose them."

"Wind and wave are treacherous here as elsewhere," she responded lightly.

"Yet we must admit that there is a great difference between the sturdy blasts of northern climes and the soft zephyrs of this semi-tropic region; between the white crests of the Atlantic and the peaceful azure of the Pacific. Fancy, now, sojourning at any of the Eastern beaches in this month of March."

"It would be idyllic, surely. There is another difference between the two great oceans that is in favor of the stormier one. The Atlantic is covered with life. Anywhere along the shore you may see sails of different descriptions, furnishing unlimited material for conjecture as to their freight of humanity. This calm expanse is unutterably lonely; the

effect is depressing, unless one can lose one's self in contemplation of its grandeur."

"It gives me inspiration."

"You are a writer--a poet, perhaps? Pardon me," as she noted a shade of embarrassment upon the countenance before her.

"Scarcely a writer--certainly not a poet. I have tried to cultivate the faculty of expression since I was put *hors de combat*."

Mrs. Belknap looked her interest. The gentleman was evidently an invalid; he was rather slightly built, hardly medium height, and his face was pale. A broad, intellectual brow, and clear, gray eyes redeemed his face from absolute plainness and gave it force. One felt that this man was stronger mentally and morally than he was physically.

"Allow me," he added, handing her a card. "May I know to whom I am indebted for the rescue of my manuscript?"

Smilingly, Mrs. Belknap took a card from the embroidered bag hanging on her arm.

Lifting his hat, the stranger bowed, and stood looking after her as she returned to the hotel.

So this man and woman met, in that mysterious entangling of paths that is the fate of mankind, for good or for ill, who shall at the time determine? Many interviews followed. John Manning, like Mrs.

Belknap, was unconventional, and a stranger in a strange land. When he found his new acquaintance sitting apart on the veranda after dinner that evening, he walked directly over to her and engaged her in conversation. Mrs. Belknap learned that he was a lawyer by profession, but a severe rheumatic fever had left him with troubles that bade fair to become chronic. For a year he had been in quest of health. He had tried the hot springs of the South and the dry air of Colorado and New Mexico. If the famous climate of California did not work a cure, he supposed he could only resign himself to the inevitable.

"It is not easy," he added, with a bitter smile, "for a naturally active man to sit and do nothing, especially if he has not previously made his fortune. For those reasons, I have turned my attention to literature, but I have not got beyond a little newspaper and magazine work yet."

It was an unusual thing for John Manning to speak of himself and his circumstances. The influence of a sympathetic presence is great, and he had an idea that this lady was no better endowed with worldly goods than himself. Something that Mrs. Belknap said confirmed this idea. She gave him the impression that she was spending a brief vacation by the sea, and that soon she must take up the active duties of life.

"A working-woman," he thought; "I know it by her quiet, self-respecting independence."

Somehow there was a bond of understanding between them from that night. In the days that followed they passed hours in reading or talking together. Evening found them upon the spacious veranda, where the moonlight poured down its mellow rays, watching the gay promenaders upon the beach and the golden pathway upon the shimmering water. Mrs. Belknap's avoidance of the lively crowd was another proof that she did not belong to that sphere of life.

"But how vastly superior she is," John Manning thought, "to those thoughtless followers after fashion! A woman with a history! It is written upon her face. Can widowhood alone be the cause of that repressed look, that yearning expression that sometimes comes into her eyes? I think not."

One day they were speaking about the recent marriage of two well-known people—a man of fifty-four and a girl of seventeen. "That is the way with you bachelors," Mrs. Belknap said, laughingly; "when you capitulate, it is most invariably to a young girl. I do not wonder at it, for what is so sweet as a fresh, young creature just budding into womanhood?"

"A mature woman's perfected soul!" replied John Manning, reverently. "Nothing can surpass it.

The freshness of youth is a pretty thing, but it fades away, while the charm that is acquired by the discipline of experience increases with the advance of time. A woman of spirituality may defy age—she will never become uninteresting."

"That would account for the affection sometimes felt by men for women much older than themselves, as that of Mr. Cross for George Eliot. Still it is plain, in the majority of cases, that a *passe* woman can not hold her own against youth and beauty, no matter how refined or accomplished she may be."

"Such women as I have in mind never become *passe*."

The conversation veered to John's literary work. Mrs. Belknap rejoiced to learn that one of the New York dailies requested regular letters, and a leading magazine had complimented his last article. "This gives me bread and butter," he said, "and heart to work; but I shall not be satisfied until I write a book; I have one outlined now, but I can not elaborate it as I am now situated. My income must not stop, and you know that publishing is expensive business."

"I should like to see your book," Mrs. Belknap said gently; "perhaps I shall some day."

Nearly four weeks had passed when she announced that she must return to Los Angeles. A blank look

came into John Manning's face; he had forgotten that the present state of things could not last indefinitely. "Must you go?"

"I am wanted there," she replied, not adding that some legal business required her attention.

How unjust it seemed for this woman to be subservient to people no doubt on a far lower plane of being than herself! How gladly he would save her, if he could, from the rude knocks of a work-a-day world! More than ever before he realized that money and labor should be more equally and appropriately distributed. He had thought Bellamy's theories chimerical, but just now if he could avail himself of a generous credit card from the government he would — what?

Could he, even then, ask that self-contained, noble-hearted woman to wed such a sorry specimen of manhood as he was? A creature who poked along like an octogenarian, and groaned if his toe struck a cobblestone? It would be utter selfishness.

"We never prize health until we lose it," he sighed; "I worked hard to build up a good practice, and then, presto! the scene changed and doctors, drugs and depleted finances became the order of the day. If I had my health and profession back again, do you think I would let that woman go out of my life without an effort to keep her?" This fiercely, as

to an unseen interlocutor. Each discerned a change in the other during the few days that followed. John Manning wanted to speak, but dared not; Mrs. Belknap was distant and silent.

"This must not be a final good-bye," exclaimed John, as the train was ready to depart. "You will let me call on you in Los Angeles?"

"I shall be very glad to see you," she replied, giving him her address.

The annual flower fete at Los Angeles took place in the last week in April—a scene out of fairyland. In the evening, when electric lights cast their brilliant rays upon the rainbow-hued exhibits, the sparkling diamonds and rich dress of the fashionable throng that fills the building, the sight is memorable.

Alice Belknap stood in the broad lower gallery, looking down upon it, when she saw her seaside friend approaching her. As their eyes met, he smiled. There was a cheery, even eager, look upon his face that had not been there when she left him at Santa Monica three weeks before.

"You are better," she said, as they shook hands.

"Considerably better," he assented; "it is the first real gain I have noticed. I have been at the Arrowhead hot springs, and found the mud baths really beneficial. But you—are you not well?"

"I am in my usual health."

" You look pale ; you must be weary standing. I've been hunting for you in the crowd an hour ; your landlady told me you were here."

" I am tired ; I think I will go now."

John did not ask her permission, but escorted her from the building, which was near her boarding-place.

" Don't go home yet," he pleaded. " The night is mild, and there are plenty of seats in this pretty little park. I want to talk with you."

Nothing was said, however, for some minutes. Mrs. Belknap leaned her head against the iron chair-back and gazed at the tropical shrubs so clearly outlined in the electric light. John's eyes were on her face.

He spoke abruptly. " Alice, I love you ! I have not had the least encouragement from you. I am not a strong man or a wealthy one, but I love you ! I have hopes now that I shall regain my health. Tell me, dear, could I make you any happier?"

Alice's hands trembled, her eyelids quivered ; she did not look up. In a moment she said :

" You are both strong and wealthy. Strong in those characteristics that make a man worthy of his manhood ; wealthy in those attributes of heart that win the love of woman. Yes, John, you could make me happier."

Her eyes met his now, and they were filled with the light of a great joy.

The next morning she said to him : " It is I who am selfish in allowing you to marry me instead of a bright young girl. I am very nearly as old as you."

" I would not have you one day younger. I love you for being exactly what you are. Consider well the risk that you run. What if I should become unable to work? I should never forgive myself for linking your lot with mine."

" Do you not believe that your wife would deem it a privilege to work for you if it should be necessary?"

" I believe that you are constituted to be God's best gift to man—a true helpmeet."

" You will recover your health, I feel sure of it, and you will write your book. I shall be your prime minister in that undertaking. Your hieroglyphics (you do write wretchedly, John, that comes of being a lawyer) will be deciphered and copied by me. I shall read your proof and make myself indispensable generally. No protests; it will be a delight to me, and there will be the pleasure of refuting Daudet's assertion that intellectual men are hampered by marriage."

" I wonder you don't write a book yourself, such a clever woman as you are."

" I'd much rather have my husband write one. I shall be very proud of you, John."

"Little flatterer!"

In a month they were married; there was no reason for delay. By mutual desire the honeymoon was spent at the Arcadia. Alice Manning's expressive face blossomed into beauty under the vivifying influence of love, and her husband counted himself blessed among men. Again they sat watching the beach and the ocean by moonlight; this time Alice held John's firm, white hand in hers and caressed it as they talked.

She had many pretty little ways that were a perpetual surprise and pleasure to her husband. Depths of tenderness constantly revealed themselves, and John sometimes fancied that in her love was an element of gratitude which sought for every avenue of expression.

"Now the tide of European travel is at its height," Alice remarked. "Have you ever thought you would like a trip abroad?"

"I have hoped to be able to go some day."

"It has always been a dream of mine to go—with pleasant company. Suppose we telegraph to New York for passage. I am sure the change would be good for you. The famous German baths may work wonders. Then, wouldn't you enjoy a quiet stay by the charming Swiss lakes, and, possibly, a cruise on the Mediterranean?"

Was she joking? John looked at his wife in amazement.

"No, my head is not turned by happiness. I assure you that such a journey is quite within the possibilities. You have only to express your preference."

John was speechless. "My love, was it very wrong of me to allow you to think me a poor woman?"

"Then you are rich!" John's face grew white, and he tried to draw his hand away; Alice clung to it tightly.

"At first, it pleased me to keep you in ignorance of my financial independence; afterward, I dared not tell you, for I knew your pride. You must not suppose that I feared my money would be a temptation to you. If you had known of it—"

"I should not have asked you to marry me."

"That absolves me, does it not?"

John's face was still set with pride. "I wish it were not so," he said, speaking with difficulty. "You give me everything. I cannot make a fair return."

"Say not so, John! I have never told you of my past life. If you knew all, you would realize that your love and protecting tenderness are priceless to me. Does he who feeds a starving person, give nothing? Does the shepherd who takes in his arms

a chilled and weary lamb and warms and soothes it, do nothing? My husband, I never *lived* until now. You have led me out of the horrible wilderness of solitude into the realms of peace and joy. God bless you for it!"

Alice's intense, passionate words thrilled John Manning through and through. The glimpse they gave of her unhappy past deepened his tenderness for her. "My poor darling," he murmured, "you know what the world will say."

"What do we care for the world?" Tears stood in her eyes now. "In the game of life, hearts should lead, and if they are trumps, they are sure to win. Look at me, John. Are you sorry that you married me?"

Soul met soul in the gaze that followed, and the question was answered without words.

A MID-DAY CALL AT MINER'S FLAT.

IT was a broiling day in mid-summer at Miner's Flat. The scorching rays of an Arizona sun mercilessly sought out every nook and corner of the camp, unobstructed by shade of any kind. Alice Marriner thought of the hills and dells, the leafy nooks and rippling waters of her old home in New England as she paused for a moment in the kitchen door, and looked out upon the broad and sterile plain where not a single tree relieved the monotony of the landscape. It was a dreary, uninviting spot for a home, and the quick tears sprang to Alice's eyes as a wave of longing for something different—something better--than this in life swept over her. But they were speedily brushed away, and the girl turned back to her work in the sweltering little kitchen. "How foolish of me!" she thought. "Haven't I one of the very best brothers in the world? And doesn't he toil from morning till night to give me a home, and deny himself many a pleasure that he could enjoy but for me? What right have I to complain because we don't live in the pleasantest place in the world and have all the

luxuries of a millionaire? Alice Marriner, thank your lucky stars that things are no worse, and hurry up with your dinner. Henry will be here in thirty-five minutes as hungry as a bear."

So, with deft, quick movements, Alice set the potatoes over the fire, gave the savory-smelling roast in the oven a good basting and was "creaming" the butter and sugar for the pudding sauce, when tap, tap, came a knock at the front door.

"My goodness! Who's that, I wonder?" exclaimed Alice, hastily substituting a clean white apron for her floury kitchen one, and shutting the stove dampers that nothing might burn in her absence. She crossed the little sitting-room, which also served as dining-room and as Henry's bed-room—for this was the land of cot-beds and blankets—and opened the outer door.

"Te-he-he!" giggled Miss Laura—commonly and appropriately called Lolly—Fayette. "Was passing by and thought I'd call," with a glance that was calculated to be bewitching at her companion, a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow in a white suit and Panama hat.

"I'm glad to see you," said Alice, politely. "Walk in, please. Take this rocker, Lolly; and Mr. Harwood, allow me to relieve you of your hat."

"Distressingly warm, isn't it?" languished Miss

Lolly, plying her fan with as much vigor as she could muster. "I never should have ventured out in such a sun, only Velma Sykes is going away on the noon stage, and I was positively obliged to see her about some things she is going to get for me in San Francisco. I met Mr. Harwood, and he was good enough to walk along with me and carry my umbrella. So I told him it was a good time to run in and see you."

A good time for them, perhaps, but not for Alice, who felt that her face was as red as a lobster with the heat of the cook stove, who had doubts about the smoothness of her hair, and knew that Henry could not wait many minutes for his dinner. But Alice was a real lady, and entertained her callers as gracefully as if their visit were not *malapropos*. It was not perfectly easy to do this, for Miss Fayette seemed bent upon showing up the discomforts of Alice's life, and Mr. Harwood had never been in the house before. He had not been in Miner's Flat many weeks, and Alice's acquaintance with him was but slight.

"Mercy me! how thick the flies are," said Laura, dabbing at one which was endeavoring to get a taste of the "Magnolia Balm" upon her cheek. "I should think they'd eat you up."

"There are a good many this summer," replied Alice, "and we are late about getting our screen doors on. Brother is so tired when he gets home at

night. Next week he'll be on the night shift and will have some leisure through the day."

"Oh, does he put them on? We always hire such jobs done, and then the season isn't half over before you're fixed up." Alice flushed, but checked the answer that rose to her lips, reflecting that Laura did not realize how impertinent her language was—it was her way. But she wished Laura would not say such things before Mr. Harwood. He had given Laura a strange look when she made her last speech, and now sat gazing respectfully but critically at Alice.

"How did you enjoy the festival, Miss Marriner?" he inquired.

"Very well, indeed. Everyone was so social, and I so seldom go out in the evening."

"I don't see what you shut yourself up so for," interrupted Laura. "You're cooking and scrubbing all day, and I should think you'd want some recreation when night comes. You take in sewing, too, don't you?" with an inflection that plainly evinced her estimate of such menial employment.

"Yes, sometimes," replied Alice, quietly, "as I have a good sewing machine, and am anxious to help all I can."

"Well, if 'twas me I shouldn't distress myself as long as my brother could support me. It's too hot weather to work. I should think you'd roast in a

little bit of a house like this," glancing through the half-open door at the kitchen fire.

"Is not it as hot for my brother as for me?" asked Alice, striving to remain composed. "And he is not strong. Indeed, that is why we came to this Southern country—the doctor said he must go away from the cold winters. Henry is just as good to me as he can be, and he is all that I have. I could not rest easy one minute if I did not make his burden as light as possible."

Alice's head was erect now, and her eyes shone with a steady, loving light.

Wallace Harwood looked at her admiringly. Laura Fayette saw it—it was the very thing she was working against. She had brought Wallace in here on purpose, knowing that he had been very favorably impressed with the gentle, modest girl whom he had met in company a few times, and determined to counteract this impression if she could do so, by showing up the poverty of the Marriners, and Alice's "drudgery" at home.

Mr. Wallace Harwood was a young man of means, and good looking withal—though that was of secondary importance—and Miss Laura had designs upon him.

"I declare, it's your dinner time, ain't it?" as innocently as if she had not been fully aware of it

before she knocked at the door. "Don't let us hinder you. For my part, I don't see how you can eat dinner at this time of day. We don't have ours until five o'clock."

"I confess that I prefer dinner at night myself," replied Alice. "But, when a man does hard work, he needs his most substantial meal in the middle of the day."

"That is so," said Mr. Harwood, "and I am not yet weaned from Yankee customs."

"Then you are from New England?" ejaculated Alice, breathlessly. "From what part, pray?"

"From W——, Massachusetts."

"Ah! And I am from New Hampshire. But Massachusetts is almost equally familiar to me. I have cousins living near W——."

"May I ask their names?"

Laura was not at all pleased with Mr. Harwood's tone of interest, or with the turn in the conversation. She had been born and bred on the Pacific coast, and entertained a supreme contempt for everything outside of San Francisco. Alice's answer was checked by the arrival of her brother, who passed the muslin-draped window and proceeded to wash his face and hands at the bench by the kitchen door. Mr. Harwood arose and said, "Do please excuse us for bothering you at this hour. I will inquire about the

cousins some other time. Come, Miss Fayette, let us give Miss Marriner a chance to give her brother his dinner."

"Not until I have introduced him to you," entreated Alice, who was in no wise ashamed of her miner brother, despite his blue flannel shirt and ugly overalls. "And won't you both stay to dinner?"

Laura declared that it would be utterly impossible for her to eat a morsel so soon after breakfast, and Mr. Harwood politely declined.

"Come in, Henry," called Alice, "I want to see you."

"Henry" appeared in the doorway—a sunburned, honest-faced young man of about twenty-five, whose eyes lighted affectionately as they rested upon his sister. Miss Fayette bowed distantly, and Alice introduced the young men to each other. They shook hands cordially, and presently Henry supplemented his sister's invitation for the callers to remain to dinner, while Alice, warned by the advancing hand of the clock, began to spread the table. The visitors still declined, however, and bowed themselves out, Laura urging Alice, with hypocritical ardor, to come and see her often. Alice flew around like a bird, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing her brother sitting at the table, and doing ample justice to her cooking.

"Come, sis, sit down," said Henry; "there's

enough on the table for three or four men now. Sit down, and tell me all about your fine company. But did you have that smooch on your face when they were here?" pausing with a piece of meat half-way to his mouth.

"What smooch?" Alice hastily arose and crossed to the little looking-glass. "Oh, horrible!" as she beheld a sooty mark upon one temple. "However did that get there? Oh! I know; it was when I stooped down to baste the meat. I remember that I hit my forehead against the corner of the stove. Oh, I never, never will go to the door again until I have looked into the glass." Her overcharged feelings could not longer be controlled. She burst into tears. She liked Mr. Harwood so much, and what must he think of her? It was bad enough for Lolly Fayette to show him how different her life was from that to which he was accustomed; but this was far worse, for this savored of untidiness, and Alice knew that every well-regulated man had a healthy horror of the least indication of a sloven in a woman.

"Tut, tut, sis," said Henry, soothingly. "Don't cry. That's only a trifle."

"But it looks so—so—frowsly," becoming incoherent, "like a—a—." Sobs finished the sentence.

"See here, Allie," cried Henry, jumping up and putting his arms around the quivering figure, "I can't

have you feeling like this. You're all tired out and used up with the heat. You shan't work so any more. I'll get some one to help you before I'm a day older."

If Henry Marriner had been a strategist, instead of a great, warm-hearted fellow who loved his little sister dearly, he could not have hit upon a surer method of drying Alice's tears.

"Go back to your dinner, you foolish boy," she commanded; "and don't you dare to talk to me about 'help.' A pretty young woman I am if I can't do all there is to be done just for you and I. You are not afraid to soil your hands with work—why should I be above a paltry smooch on my face? Come, dear, try some of my pudding."

Laura Fayette was not quite sure that her scheme had worked in the desired manner, as she pursued her way homeward. Wallace accompanied her as far as the gate, but quietly declined her urgent invitation to lunch, and, lifting his hat, passed on. If she had chanced to be in the neighborhood of the Marriners just before dusk on the following day, she would have seen something which would have convinced her that her labors had been in vain—Wallace Hardwood taking a reluctant leave of Alice Marriner, just outside the open door, after a pleasant call, when no discordant element had marred an earnest, unconventional conversation.

Wallace had lost no time in inquiring about the "cousins near W——;" and judging by the frequency of his calls thereafter, and the length of his interviews with Miss Alice, there must have been a great deal to say about the distant relatives. It was not long before the residents of Miner's Flat became accustomed to seeing these two out riding together at the sunset hour, or walking arm-in-arm up and down the moonlit street, enjoying the cool breezes that seldom failed to blow over the camp at night, after a long and sultry day. It was patent to everyone that the elegant young visitor had fallen "dead in love" with pretty, unpretending Alice Marriner. Some croaked that his attention could mean no good — a rich young fellow like him would never marry a miner's sister. But their doubts were set at rest one fine morning in autumn, when a certain marriage notice met their eyes in the *Daily Silver Star*, coupled with the announcement that the happy pair would leave Miner's Flat on the twelve o'clock stage for an extended tour through the Eastern states prior to settling in their new home in Southern California.

"It's so good of you, Wallace, dear," said the bride, "to decide that you will live in Santa Barbara so that Henry and I need not be separated, for he would hardly dare venture into a cold climate yet. And it will be so nice for him to take charge of that

ranch you have bought. He will soon be as strong as ever, I know. I can't think how you ever came to fancy such a plain little mortal as I am, Wallace." The brown eyes looked up to his with a world of love and confidence in them.

"It was that mid-day call which did it," laughed Wallace. "I liked your appearance before, but that finished me."

"Pray, what constituted the charm, my lord! Could it have been the dusky smooch that ornamented my brow? Or was it my healthy color? Speak, I conjure you, and solve the mystic problem."

"I warn you not to be saucy," and Wallace gave his wife a specimen of the punishment in store for her. "It was one—both—everything. It was the vast difference between you and the ordinary girl of the period—the fashionable miss who is too delicate to work, but able to dance all night; who despises honest poverty, but cares not from how disgraceful a source the money emanates which slips through her fingers so quickly. Pshaw! what do I want of a wife like that? What enjoyment could I derive from her companionship? What would I find in her to love? I have *you*, my treasure. God be thanked for that. I know your worth, and may I be worthy of you! I don't intend that these dear hands shall ever be employed in wearisome tasks, but it is a pleasant

thought that if it were necessary, you would work them to the bone for one you loved."

"Indeed I would," exclaimed Alice.

"I trust you will never be obliged to, my darling," replied Wallace, gravely and reverently. "But how different is Laura Fayette! As long as her father continues to prosper in the liquor business, she can play the lady; but if reverses come, as they so frequently do in these reckless frontier towns, where will she be? She served me one good turn, though unwittingly, when she brought me to your door on that scorching July day just four months ago. She paved the way for the happiness which I now enjoy, and we'll thank her for that, will we not, my dearest?"

"Actions speak louder than words," and Wallace Harwood was fully satisfied with his answer.

THE MYSTERIOUS MISS ALDEMAN.

"HAVE you called on Miss Aldeman yet, my dear?" queried Mr. Morley, as he complacently brushed a crumb from his immaculate shirt front, while awaiting the arrival of dessert upon the table.

"Called upon Miss Aldeman! Certainly not," responded Mrs. Morley, in tones of unmistakable astonishment and hauteur.

"And why 'certainly not?'" persisted the head of the house. Mrs. Morley looked across the well appointed table at him for a moment in speechless indignation. "One would think you expected me to associate with all the common people in town," she said at last, cuttingly. "Miss Aldeman is not in 'our set' at all. Why, she *works for a living!*'"

If the young lady in question had committed some heinous crime, it could not have been spoken of with more crushing emphasis.

"Well, what of that?" replied Mr. Morley, quietly. "So do I, for that matter. I suppose you

consider *me* in your set?" And the impertinent man arched his eyebrows and looked over at his wife in affected concern.

" You are ridiculous, Mr. Morley," snapped that irate individual. " It is perfectly honorable and *au fait* for a man to support his family, and your occupation of broker is eminently respectable. But Miss Aldeman actually teaches music, and sews, and I don't know what all. How she can have the face to put herself among high-toned people, I don't see."

" Perhaps because that face is so very good-looking, my dear," said Mr. Morley, facetiously. " I'm sure I don't see anything dishonorable in a young lady earning her own living in whatever manner she finds it possible to do so, if she has no one to earn it for her. It is true, it is more fashionable for a girl to know nothing of any real consequence, to sit in the parlor all day long with limp hands and pronounce life a bore, until she catches some foolish fellow, who doesn't know any better, in the matrimonial noose. But, for my part, I prefer the girl of old times. *She* was sensible, and, when she married, she made a good help-meet to her lucky husband. Ah, well, one does not see many of that kind now-a-days."

Mr. Morley sighed, and munched his grapes with an abstracted air, which gave place to one of amusement on hearing his wife's next sally.

"I really believe, Freeman Morley, that you have fallen in love with Louise Aldeman!"

Now this *was* an absurd speech, for Mr. Freeman Morley was bald-headed, rotund, and being on the shady side of fifty, not a man calculated to inspire the tender passion in the heart of a young lady, or prone to cherish other than paternal feelings towards one so many years his junior.

"Not so fast, my dear," remarked Mr. Morley, good-humoredly. A man is always in good humor after dinner, you know, and then Mr. Morley had never been in ill humor a dozen times in his life. "Not so fast. I certainly admire the young lady for her independence, and the sterling good qualities that I believe her to possess; but I don't think it need to cause you any uneasiness, my dear. I spoke of her to-day because I met her on my way home to dinner, and it occurred to me to ask if you had made her acquaintance. I am positive you would like her, Mrs. Morley."

The lady deigned no reply to this, but dinner being over, sailed majestically from the room.

Louise Aldeman, the subject of this post prandial discussion, was a very prepossessing looking young lady, of quiet, well-bred demeanor, who made her appearance in the aspiring-to-be-fashionable town of Nebulon, California, some five or six months previous

to the opening of our story. Little was known about her save that she brought letters of recommendation from the East to the pastor of one of the churches, and one or two other prominent personages. These, coupled with the young lady's pleasing appearance, produced so favorable an impression that she was, at her earnest request, admitted to board in the pastor's own family, and was given the *entree* to a very respectable class of society. Some there were who, like Mrs. Morley, stood aloof from the new-comer, on account of the mystery surrounding her antecedents and the evident impoverished condition of her purse; but she had, by this time, won warm friends as well, friends who occupied a social status, in some cases, equal to that of Mrs. Morley. This was what occasioned that haughty dame's insinuation that Miss Aldeman had "put herself" among people of unexceptionable standing in the community. Miss Aldeman herself would have indignantly, if quietly, resented the inference had she heard it, for she possessed a nature that, so far from being obtrusive, was very considerably reserved. Instead of making advances herself, it was found necessary by those desirous of forming her acquaintance, to seek her company; and their favors, if accepted at all, were received with a mingling of self-respect and appreciation. Those who knew her best declared that,

behind the mask which she presented to the world, there existed the warmest, most sympathetic of hearts, and an eloquence of tongue not suspected by the public, who found her a delightful listener, but a modest conversationalist. Miss Aldeman had been in Nebulon but a week when she advertised for pupils in music, and, three months later, finding the class not sufficiently remunerative to place her on a secure monetary basis, even by the exercise of the most rigid economy, she signified her willingness to do dressmaking, either in families, or at home. A certain number of days in each week were devoted to this occupation, there being no dearth of customers, and those remaining were set aside for the music lessons. The children loved their teacher, and made good progress. The fact could not be denied that Miss Aldeman was a thorough mistress of the piano, and her services were sometimes secured at concerts and entertainments, when she never failed to add greatly to the merits of the programme. But when Mrs. Freeman Morley, and others of like calibre, had the management of such affairs, it is needless to say that Miss Aldeman's services were not required. Despite her impecunious situation, her attire was always that befitting a lady of refinement. She had apparently lost some friend quite recently, although she did not wear deep mourning, but confined herself

to plain black or white. The excellent material invariably used, the style of construction, and the manner of wearing, all combined to give her a *distingue* air in whatever costume she assumed. It was really too provoking, Mrs. Morley thought. Much as she prided herself on her undisputed position, her haughty carriage, and her luxuriant wardrobe, she envied Miss Aldeman the nameless air of grace and elegance that hung about her. But the presuming creature *worked for a living*, and was, therefore, not a fit companion for those "born to the purple." Born, did I say? That was not the case with Mrs. Morley. Her father was a hard-working shoemaker, and his daughter found it necessary to go out to service at the period of her life when she ought to have been attending school. But all that was forgotten long ago, and woe betide Freeman Morley should he so far forget himself as to allude to that buried past. Mrs. Morley, like many another similarly situated woman, became arrogant and vain on her assumption to wealth, and displayed an infinitesimal amount of either charity or sympathy for those traveling over the same rough road her now delicately shod feet had once trodden. It is so the world over. Well born and carefully reared people, who are accustomed from earliest infancy to all the advantages of what is termed "high life," seldom forget what constitutes a true lady or gentleman.

A few evenings after the above quoted conversation of Mr. and Mrs. Morley, the handsome mansion of Mrs. Warner, wife of the principal merchant of the town, was brilliantly lighted, and thrown open to the *creme de la creme* of Nebulon society. Silks rustled, jewels flashed, and the perfume from a wealth of exotics filled the air. Conspicuous among the fashionably attired throng Miss Aldeman stood, tall, pale, queenly, her exquisitely fitting robe of heavy black silk forming a decided contrast to her surroundings, but presenting no sense of incongruity in its quiet elegance. A lily nestling among the rich laces at her throat, and another amid the dark braids of her hair, formed her only ornaments.

She had not cared to attend this party, in fact, had felt a strange reluctance in doing so, a shrinking as from some ill to come. But Mrs. Warner had insisted on her services in filling up a programme which embraced the best vocal and instrumental talent in town, and she had cast aside her misgivings with a light laugh at their folly.

The evening was well advanced. Half the programme had been accomplished. Miss Aldeman had rendered one of Beethoven's sonatas in a masterly manner, and the assembled company were enjoying an interval of sociability, when the hum of voices, and the sound of merry laughter, filled the spacious apart-

ments. Miss Aldeman, sitting in a low chair near the piano, conversing with a couple of benign old ladies, was half hidden from those standing about her. Unconsciously her attention was drawn to a conversation near at hand.

"Who are those new arrivals," asked a blithe young voice; "they are most fashionably late—it must be past eleven."

"I don't know," responded another feminine voice, "but I judge they are acquisitions to our rather limited circle of attractive young men. The taller one, in particular, is very fine-looking. I say, Rob, who are those young gentlemen just bowing to Miss Warner?"

"Hey? with Miss Warner?" rather absently queried the "Rob" addressed, turning his eyes reluctantly from a fair face across the room, to the direction indicated by his sister. "Why—no, it can't be—by Jove! it is. Hal Bentley's got home! And that's his chum with him—travelled over Europe together—inseparable since they met at college. I saw them both a few months ago, when I was East."

"But what is the other gentleman's name," persisted the young girl on the other side of "Rob's" sister. "He must surely be known by some other appellation than that of 'Hal Bentley's chum.'" And the saucy miss darted a look of captivating archness from beneath her dainty eyebrows.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? Well, Miss Inquisitiveness, his name is Ralph Winchester. I see that you girls are meditating mischief already; but I warn you that Winchester's no easy game—said to be proof against womankind. You'll find Hal on hand for a flirtation, though."

Here the colloquy came to an abrupt termination, for a sudden bustle in the rear caused the speakers to turn their heads in quest of the cause of the confusion.

"Look at Miss Aldeman!" whispered one to another. She, who had never since her advent in Nebulon swerved from the maintenance of perfect composure, was actually being led through the low window to the vine-wreathed piazza outside, in a fainting condition. Adolph Warner, the eldest son of the hostess, chancing to be close by Miss Aldeman's side, sprang to her relief when she swayed in her chair, and caught her hurried words, gasped forth with difficulty—"take me away—away from here, quick!"

He at once put aside the ladies who closed around them with ejaculations of sympathy and proffers of assistance, and half carried the drooping girl into the balmy night air, which he knew would act as the most powerful restorative that could be administered.

"She will be better directly," he said, "as soon

as she gets out of this close room. She had better be perfectly quiet."

"I told her only yesterday," asseverated a matron of commanding mein, "that she was killing herself; but she declared that work was good for her."

Adolph seated Miss Aldeman in a large wicker chair, and, perceiving that there was now little danger of her losing consciousness, hurried away for a glass of water. Silently she drank as he held the glass to her lips, then, with a low murmur of thanks, sank back in her chair. But, as he was about to speak, she half rose, and cried out;

"Oh, Mr. Warner, I must go home at once. Will you make an excuse to Mrs. Warner? I am really unable to play again, and I had better go home."

"But not yet, Miss Aldeman, really not yet. You are not strong enough. Certainly you must not play again, and I will explain to mother, but you had better sit here until you are entirely recovered."

"No, no, I can not," responded Miss Aldeman, excitedly. "I would much rather go home. It is not far."

And, finding it useless to remonstrate, Adolph procured her wraps, and escorted her down the quiet street to her boarding-place. It was, as she said, not far; but he could not help wondering at her determination to take so sudden a departure, and at the

curious change from her habitual self-possession. Although several years younger than she, Adolph had for some time cherished a profound admiration for Miss Aldeman, and he now felt proud to be able to render her a service, and expressed as much when she turned to speak to him, with a few grateful words, as they stood on the steps of the pastor's residence. He then went back to the scene of festivity, where he recounted the events of the past half hour to his mother. Mrs. Warner was sorry, very sorry to learn of Miss Aldeman's indisposition, and regretted that her guests would not have the pleasure of listening to that gem of Schubert's which the young lady had promised them.

"Yes certainly," she replied to Adolph's request, "she would call to-morrow, and see if Miss Aldeman was completely recovered."

After settling this matter, Adolph sought out the new-comers, who were attracting a great deal of attention, and the three young men were soon exchanging cordial greetings. Hal Bentley was not a stranger in Nebulon, although unknown to Ella Newton and her bosom friend, Kitty Glover, who had been away from home for some years, attending school at Oakland, during which time the Bentleys had come to Nebulon to reside, and Hal had left for Yale College, afterward traveling in Europe for a year, and dallying for some

months on the Atlantic coast. At last he returned to his family, a well grown, handsome, high spirited young fellow, whose black eyes had already sought out the prettiest faces in the room, and were working havoc in the hearts of their owners.

But the elder and taller gentleman, Ralph Winchester, was, as Ella Newton had discriminately affirmed, the more striking looking of the two. Strictly speaking, his features were not as perfect as those of Hal Bentley, yet there was a likeness about them which formed a harmonious whole. It was a strong face and a noble head, which surmounted a frame of fine physical proportions. The clear gray eyes were searching, keen, yet kind—those eyes which, under passion's influence, deepen to a shadowy darkness, or glow with infinite tenderness—eyes which bespeak a loyal, ardent, trustworthy soul within. For him, the bevy of fair young girls assembled in Mrs. Warner's parlors had no more attraction than would arise from the presence of beauty in any form and place. In the abstract, it pleased him as one walking through a smooth and grassy field is pleased at the sight of numerous dainty blossoms growing along the pathway. Individually, they did not occupy an iota of his thoughts. This was his first visit to California. He had yielded to the persuasions of his chum to accompany him home, think-

ing it might possibly allay the grief that was gnawing at his heart. For months he had striven to remove the obstacle that suddenly and without warning had interposed itself between him and anticipated happiness, and his struggles had been in vain. He was prone now to relinquish all hope, yet he could not have it so.

"What in creation are you biting your moustache like that for, and staring into space with the most utterly lugubrious air? Don't you know you're at a party?" cried Hal Bentley. "A pretty idea these Nebulon girls will form of my chum! They'll think I've brought home an ogre, instead of the rarely fascinating man that you are, Ralph."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," murmured Ralph with a faint smile, coming back to a realizing sense of his whereabouts. "I believe I *was* out of order. You must bear with me a little longer, old boy; I shan't bother you as much as I have in the past."

"Ah, the deuce! it's that girl again! Come now, Winchester, you've had heart aches enough over that business. You know the old saying "There's as good fish in the sea as ever—"

Hal stopped abruptly, warned by his companion's rebuking glance; and, a moment later, was introducing Mr. Winchester to half a dozen expectant girls.

Miss Aldeman did not keep her appointments the

day after the party, and she sent word to her music pupils that she would be obliged to take a week's vacation. Those who were sufficiently interested to call and inquire for her welfare, found her not actually ill, but apparently fatigued by overwork, requiring a brief respite from her usual round of duties. The good pastor and his wife, who were daily associated with her, surmised that something more than physical ailments was disturbing her; but they did not press her confidence, and wisely breathed no word of their suspicions to the outside world. The truth was that Louise Aldeman did not *dare* to go out. She was fearful of being recognized by one whom it would be pain unspeakable to her to meet. Would she ever be able to school her emotions, she wondered, and speak to this man with the indifference that she manifested toward others, which it was now her duty to feel toward him? What a narrow escape she had from being brought unexpectedly face to face with him at Mrs. Warner's party. And what would have been the *denouement*, had such an unhappy event occurred? Louise shuddered and turned scarlet, as she thought how nearly she had betrayed her secret to the gossips of Nebulon.

Some one, she did not know who it was, had said that Hal Bently and his friend were going to the city in a few days, to take in the sights. If she could only

keep out of sight until then, all would be well, for she would be miles away from Nebulon ere they returned. But it was not likely that so remarkable a personage as Miss Aldeman would fail to be mentioned among the young men for any considerable time; and so it happened that one afternoon, when several of "the boys" were enjoying their cigars on the promenade overlooking the sea, Miss Aldeman's name was introduced.

"I say, Hal, you ought to see her," said Robert Newton. "She's a regular stunner. Not loud, either, you know—but stylish, and haughty as an empress. You'd never imagine her as poor as Job's turkey."

"What did you say her name was?" asked Hal, looking askance at Ralph Winchester, who had been loitering in the rear, and who had reached Hal's side only in season to hear the conclusion of Bob's speech.

"Miss Aldeman," replied Bob.

Ralph's head was lifted instantly, and he took an eager step forward, his eyes flashing, and his entire aspect that of a man suddenly aroused from lethargy to intense activity.

"Miss Aldeman? Of whom are you speaking? That is not a common name."

He made a strong effort to control his emotion, as he addressed himself to Robert Newton.

"Of a young lady who came here about six

months ago, from where nobody knows, who has created quite a little stir in the community by her personal charms and her musical endowments, added to the veil of mystery that enshrouds her life. No one knows who she is, or why she came alone to a strange town to earn her living, for she has no money."

"Describe her appearance, if you please."

Newton looked around at Winchester with some curiosity, as he heard the strained voice, but Ralph was walking quietly along, seemingly intent upon clipping from its stem, with the cane he swung, each bit of a blossom that gemmed the pathway; for it was soon after the close of the rainy season, and the Golden State lay decked in her rarest garments.

A very fair description of Miss Aldeman followed, concluded by the remark, that "more than one fellow would be glad to win her, mystery and all, but she wouldn't give anybody a chance."

"I think I know this Miss Aldeman," said Ralph, quietly, but Hal Bentley noted the effort it cost him. "I should like to meet her, and see if it is the lady that I once knew in the East."

"You know her? By Jove!" and the young men circled around Winchester.

"Tell us about her. Is she all right?"

The flippant youth who approached with the last query shrank back intimidated as he encountered a

lightning flash of anger from Winchester's eyes.

"She is a perfect lady," Ralph said, impressively, "and was highly esteemed as such where she resided. Come, Hal; help me to find her."

"She boards at Rev. Mr. Haydn's," said one of the number.

"All right," responded Hal, before anyone else had a chance to offer to accompany Winchester. "I'm acquainted with the Haydns. We'll call around together."

And they bade adieu to their companions and retraced their steps to the town.

"I fibbed a little then, Ralph," said Hal, when they were at a safe distance from the others. "I've no idea of going with you—of course I should be *de trop*. But I'll show you where the minister lives, for I know you won't heed my advice to keep away. Good luck to you, my boy. I hope this miserable business will be explained now."

Ralph wrung his friend's hand in speechless emotion. His face was white, and the muscles were tense and drawn.

As Hal turned a corner to another street, he saw Ralph standing on the steps of the house pointed out to him, awaiting an answer to his pull at the door bell. A more opportune time could not have been chosen. Mr. and Mrs. Haydn were spending the

afternoon in the country, and there was no one in the house but Miss Aldeman and the Chinaman who presided over the culinary department of the establishment, who chanced to pass by the front door just as the bell rang, and who good-naturedly ushered the caller straightway into Miss Aldeman's presence in the back parlor, where she sat fashioning a dainty tidy for Mrs. Haydn.

"Louise!"

"Ralph!"

Miss Aldeman sprang from her chair with the vague intention of beating a retreat, but got no farther than Ralph Winchester's arms, which enclosed her as if they could never relinquish their hold. A moment she rested passively in his embrace, and she could feel his strong frame tremble; then she summoned all her strength and pushed him from her. The tender, happy light which glowed on his face gave place to a look of sternness.

"Why do you put me from you, Louise," he said.
"Have you then ceased to love me?"

The stern voice sank to a tone of deep sadness, and he gazed reproachfully at Miss Aldeman's flushed countenance.

"Why have you come here to torture me thus?" she cried, no longer the quiet, self-contained being the people of Nebulon had known. "What do you

mean by embracing me in this manner? I gave you up long ago, and prayed that you might be happy with the one you love. I went away, where I thought I should never look upon your face again. Have you found me out only to taunt me with my love for you? Oh, you are cruel, cruel!" and the excited woman burst into a fit of violent sobbing.

"You are talking in enigmas," said Ralph, coming forward, and striving to remove her hands from her face. "I do not understand you. Nor could I comprehend why you wrote me such a note six months ago, or why you suddenly disappeared from all who knew you, and no tidings could be gained of your whereabouts. I think *you* were the cruel one, Louise. Ah! you don't know what I've suffered."

"Do I hear aright?" she said. "You have suffered? Ah, Heaven, but I thought the suffering was all mine, and *you* were happy."

"It was with the hope of clearing up this mystery that I came to you this afternoon, Louise," said Ralph, gently.

"Are you not married?" Miss Aldeman asked suddenly.

"Married! my darling, I shall never marry any woman but you."

She stared at him a moment incredulously.

"Wait here an instant," she said, and left the

room, returnly directly with an open letter, which she placed in Ralph's hand, who beheld the following words:

"MISS ALDEMAN:—You are engaged to Ralph Winchester, and he will marry you, because he has plighted you his word, and because the death of your father has left you penniless. He is too noble-hearted to cause you suffering, at a time when you are doubly in need of his solace and support. But although thus true to you in action, his *heart* has swerved from its allegiance. He loves another, and that other is Lucy Talbot. You are informed of this now, because it is better for you to know it now than after marriage.

A WELL WISHER."

Ralph read the lines through slowly, then covered his eyes with his hand. Silence reigned throughout the apartment. Raising his head, he stretched out one hand until it touched Miss Aldeman's in a firm clasp, as she sat near by, and, in a solemn tone, said :

"Louise, Heaven is my witness, the charge made against me in that letter is utterly false. I never entertained other than friendly feelings for Miss Talbot. I have loved you all the time, and I shall always love you. Do you believe me, dearest?"

The proud head was drawn to his shoulder now, and he stooped until his moustache brushed her cheek as he awaited her answer.

"I can not doubt you, Ralph," she said, and her arms stole about his neck. "But what a horrible mistake it has been! Who could have written such a deliberate falsehood?"

Ralph hesitated a moment.

"It is best that you should know all, dear," he said, at length. "I recognized that handwriting. It is Lucy Talbot's. She knew your noble, self-sacrificing nature so well that she must have been confident you would do exactly as you did—quietly and without explanation give me up, and leave the field clear to her, thinking it would ensure my happiness. Poor girl! it was a dreadful thing for her to die with the burden of such a sin upon her."

"Die? is she dead?"

"Yes, darling. I forgot that you had heard nothing from home all this time. She was thrown from her horse and instantly killed in less than a week after you went away. The revelation of her duplicity, and unfitness for death, almost overpowered me just now. But how could you believe such a thing of me, Louise? And why did you not give me a chance to speak for myself?"

"I dared not trust myself to see you, Ralph. It was so hard, so terribly hard to give you up. I was unreasonable, no doubt, and formed my conclusions too hastily, but I was almost beside myself with grief,

and little things, before unnoticed, seemed to confirm that dreadful letter. I thought the kindest thing I could do would be to hide myself forever away from you and her."

The tears rolled down Louise's cheeks at the recollection of her past suffering. Ralph kissed them away as he jocosely remarked :

" And a pretty time I've had of it, hunting for you. But I've got you now, and you won't escape me again. It's very handy having a parson right in the house, and I shan't be satisfied until the knot is fairly tied. By the way, what is this I have heard about your going out to work? I'm afraid you've had a hard tussle with the world, my poor darling."

" No, I have not," declared Louise. " I have worked, to be sure, and I should have died if I had not kept myself constantly busy—it has been the best panacea for my heart ache. I have been strong and well, and my work has not been disagreeable. My little music scholars love me, and as to the sewing—oh, you needn't start, why isn't sewing as good an employment as any? I always took to the needle handily."

" But you, with your delicate breeding, your accomplishments, surely could have engaged in some more congenial pursuit. I don't like to think of you being anybody's drudge."

"Now you are absurd," said Louise, emphasizing the statement with a soft little kiss on his sober face. "Just as if there was any more drudgery in making pretty dresses and aprons than in beating French and mathematics and English literature into the craniums of stupid boys and girls, or correcting perspectives and inculcating the principles of 'free hand' drawing when refractory fingers refuse to come within a rod of the mark. Besides, all the positions of this kind are taken up here."

"How came you to choose this far-away place for your self-imposed exile?"

"Because it was my birth-place, and I always had a desire to visit it. If poor father had lived another winter we should have come here together. He spent a winter here with my mother, early in their married life, and here I was born. But there are so many boarders here every year that the circumstance was long ago forgotten, and no one in Nebulon has the least idea who I am. I did not wish any one to know. I would not run the slightest risk of my whereabouts being discovered."

"Obstinate girl!" But the tone and look belied the words; and the hearts of the lovers were filled to overflowing with joy at the felicitous termination of their estrangement.

All Nebulon was surcharged with astonishment

when it became known that the handsome stranger and the obscure Miss Aldeman were engaged to be married, and that the young lady in question was obscure no longer, for she was the only daughter of none other than the famous Prof. Aldeman, whose renown as a leader and authority in scientific circles had reached every State in the Union.

"Strange we didn't think of the similarity of names," said a busybody, "although, of course, no one would have thought of her being his daughter. No wonder she has such airs. I heard Hal Bently tell his mother that she had traveled all over the Old World with her father, who was always hunting up something in the scientific line; and that their associates were savants and artists, and the proudest in the land were glad to show the Professor attention. But he never could manage money matters, and he died suddenly in his chair one day, leaving her without a dollar. You know we often wondered where she got her good clothes, and real laces, etc. It seems she had them all before her father died. Hal says she used to dress elegantly—her father was always buying her presents."

"Hum! quite a remarkable case," said Mrs. Morley to whom these remarks were addressed. "Of course I shall call now. I used to know Prof. Aldeman when I was a girl."

She might have added, but did not, that she was employed as a sort of upper house servant in the family of the young lady who afterwards became Miss Aldeman's mother, and that her acquaintance with the Professor consisted of a secret admiration for that handsome young man as she watched the course of his courtship.

Kindhearted Mr. Morley was truly rejoiced at the turn of affairs.

"Lord bless you!" he said to Miss Aldeman one day. "Come to think of it, I made your acquaintance when you hadn't been in this world more'n three months, and a right smart black-eyed baby you were, too. I recollect how proud the Professor was of you, and how gentle, and sweet and pretty your mother looked. She was one of that kind that never lives long. And so you're going to leave us, hey? And ain't going alone, either? Well you needn't blush, he's a fine fellow—anybody can see that—and I wish you joy."

It was, indeed, but a very short time before Miss Aldeman left the pretty town by the sea where a peculiar episode of her life had been enacted. One sunny afternoon in May (but are not all California afternoons sunny), there was a quiet wedding at the house of the Rev. Mr. Haydn; and the steamer that plowed its way out of the harbor at sunset bore upon

its deck as happy a bride and groom as ever sailed over Pacific waters. The crowd assembled upon the landing waved their handkerchiefs, and strained their eyes to catch a last glimpse of her who was the mysterious Miss Aldeman no longer. The sun set, the steamer rounded the Point, and Ralph Winchester drew Louise closer to his side, with an inward prayer of thanksgiving that she was at last his wife, his own sweet wife.



THE SCHOOL-MA'AM OF MINERAL HILL.

"**S**HE 's a neat one, up an' coming as you please, an' yit she a'n't stuck up," said Jake Peters, looking after the new school-ma'am that had come to Mineral Hill to teach the infantile idea of the place "how to shoot."

"A Yankee, you can just bet on that," asserted Jake's "pard," for they were a pair of stalwart, blue-shirted miners who thus criticised the passer-by. "Here comes Bill Maxley, an' if he a'n't lookin' arter her out o' the corner of his eyes. Well, that's the fust time I ever knowed Bill to take any stock in a female critter. He got h'isted by one once, and that let him out on the whole lot."

"Hollo, Bill, what 's up now?" queried Jo Walker. "I see you a castin' sheep's eyes at the school-ma'am. My pard an' I here have jist made up our minds that she 's a stunner, but we did 'nt allow that you 'd give her a look. Did ye git busted playin' faro last night, or air ye comin' down with fever an' ager, or what ails ye?"

Bill Maxley looked not over pleased with Jo's

good-natured chaffing, and showed signs of embarrassment at having been detected in his covert glances at the school-ma'am.

"I don't know as anything particular 's the matter," he replied. "I did lose all I had last night, though, but it a'n't the first time I 've been dead broke."

"Well, you 'd orter have sense enough to let it be the last," said Jake Peters. "Why don't you let gamblin' alone? There's some folks we don't expect nothin' else of, they 'd be no account any where, but you, as any one kin see, has been a gentleman; you 'd orter keep out o' such scaly cump'ny. No offense, pard, but I hate to see you goin' to the bad."

Bill colored, and shifted his position uneasily, but he knew too well what great, honest hearts beat beneath the rough exterior of these two miners to exhibit any anger at criticism occasioned by true friendship. It may be that his conscience gave him a few twinges that asserted the truth of Jake's remarks, for it was true that he had seen better days, and would once have deemed it impossible that he could contract habits which were now an every-day matter to him.

What would his lady mother say if she knew of the hours that he spent in the gay saloons, where crowds of excited men stood around the gaming-table,

and liquors flowed freely from the varied-hued bottles behind the handsome bar? What would his gentle sister Annie think if she was aware that the brother, who was once her embodiment of noble manhood, had fallen so low? Maud Hazeltine would probably curl her proud lip, and look around with renewed satisfaction at the luxuries about her,—for which she had broken her troth to him. Curse her! she was to blame for his ruin. But for her his mother and sister would not be mourning his loss, ignorant of his whereabouts for three years past. But for her he would not be what he is now. Bah! what a set of hypocrites these women were! Enticing men on to make fools of themselves with alluring smiles and languishing looks, acting at love-making with such consummate skill, and then after all their caresses and protestations of undying affection, casting off their lovers for more desirable *partis*, for bigger diamonds, richer dresses, grander equipages, more magnificent establishments?

A devil-may-care expression spread itself over Maxley's fine face, as he sauntered along, thinking of the time in the past when Maud Hazeltine had looked up at him with her beautiful blue eyes all aglow with lovelight (as he had insanely imagined), when her soft arms had clung about his neck, loth to part with him

for even a few hours, and her sweet, false voice had prattled of love in the most entrancing manner.

He was the luckiest fellow in the universe, and the sweetest of women was to be his wife ere six months had passed. That was before Theophilus Campernon came to Rayville, and set the feminine world agog with his horses and carriages, his servants in livery, and various appurtenances of unbounded wealth. Theophilus Campernon was sixty years old, and troubled with gout, owing to the fast living of thirty years or more, but his bank account was unlimited, and he was in search of a young wife. A spirited rivalry for the honor of presiding over the lion's superb establishment sprang up among the fair ones of Rayville.

For a time Maxley observed no change in Maud ; but soon it became a matter of much envious comment that Mr. Campernon had eyes and ears for no one but the beautiful Miss Hazeltine. Sundry bets of gloves and chocolates were laid by the young ladies of the neighborhood, in regard to the stability of Maud's affections. Some, who were disposed to take every one at his best, could not believe that she would break her engagement, and throw over the best-looking young fellow in Rayville for the sake of a gray-headed old man with a little more money. Others, not inclined to take so favorable a view of human

nature, declared it their belief that Maud Hazeltine would not let slip the chance to become the greatest lady thereabouts, and they were right,—she did not.

Will Maxley's nature could not long brook the transfer of Maud's favor from him to Theophilus Camperton, and stormy words ensued when Maud signified her intention to marry the richer suitor, regardless of vows that seemed to Will so sacred. Cut to the heart by his loved one's perfidy, Will bade his mother and sister a hasty good-bye, and left home, in a nearly frantic state, for parts unknown. He had wandered from place to place, seeking relief from the pangs of disappointed affection that tormented him, and now here he was at Mineral Hill, in the far West, delving, with men from all parts of the world, in the mines. The rough life suited his frame of mind, perverted from its natural channel by the overwhelming force of the wave of trouble that had swept over him; and the hard labor was the best panacea for his tortured brain.

Gradually he acquired, in some measure, the uncultivated speech and ways of the majority of his co-workers; and, from forming an idle spectator to the progress of the games, he became a reckless participant, forgetting, for the time being, his troubles in the excitement of the hour. One vice he escaped. He drank sparingly, the finer instincts of his nature

revolting from an intemperate use of stimulants.

Something in the appearance of Miss Brannan, the teacher, had arrested his attention as he passed her. It was, as Jake Peters had said, an unusual thing for him to notice a woman, except to avoid her; for the treachery of one whom he had believed the incarnation of all that was lovely had embittered his heart toward the whole sex, and he now bore the title of "the woman-hater." It was something in Miss Brannan's figure and carriage that had caught his eye, and it was with bitterness he acknowledged that that something was a resemblance to his false fiancee. She had Maud's erect, finely proportioned figure, and her step was the same firm, somewhat dignified one; but there the likeness ended. A very different face was Miss Brannan's from Maud Hazelton's. Clear gray eyes, with a capacity for passion slumbering in their depths; slightly irregular features, firm-set chin, and mouth presenting the combined characteristics of decision and womanly sweetness in the finely-curved lips; rich-brown hair waving back from an intellectual forehead, and coiled low in the back of her shapely neck,—instead of Maud's azure orbs, small features as perfectly chiseled as those of a statue, and golden hair crowning her haughty head in a coronet of braids.

"Bill" Maxley (as he was now universally styled)

did not discover all the peculiarities of Miss Brannan's physiognomy in the one cursory glance that he bestowed upon her on the day that he received Jake Peter's kindly admonition. It was the result of sundry observations in days following, for he found himself almost unconsciously scanning the school-teacher at every opportunity, afterward taking himself to task for a fool in noticing a member of the sex he hated.

"False as the rest, probably," he soliloquized. "The less a man has to do with them, the better."

Miss Brannan, in her turn, not being above the usual predisposition of young ladies for handsome young men, had not failed to observe the tall, broad-shouldered, dark-eyed and moustached miner, who strode along the streets with such a proud air, and bore so unmistakably the impress of finer breeding than was the portion of most of his class. There was something mysterious about this dark-browed fellow. She was sure he had a history, and it was a sad one, for the stamp of melancholy was plainly engraved upon his face. After a while, she heard that he was a "woman-hater," and that inflamed her desire to know something of his life; but Claribel Brannan was as proud as Bill Maxley in her way, and she never by glance or motion revealed to him the fact that she was more than ordinarily interested in him. At last, Fate, in the guise of an unruly horse,

brought about an interview between the "woman-hater" and the "schoolma'am."

Maxley was returning, one day, from his work on the eight-hour shift, swinging in his hand the lunch-pail that is the miner's badge, when he saw Miss Brannan ahead, standing beside the horse which she was wont to ride about the camp, evidently endeavoring to arrange something about the saddle, while the animal frustrated her attempts with his restless motions. Another glance showed him that the saddle girth had slipped badly over to one side, whereupon his chivalric instincts prompted him to hasten to her relief. She turned her head as she heard his hasty footsteps, and stood quietly holding the horse by the bridle until he came up.

"O, sir," said she, with a smile, "I shall be so much obliged if you will help me out of this predicament. My saddle has turned, and Don won't let me fix it."

"I will have it all right in a minute," said Maxley, as he unloosed the cinch, and squared the saddle upon the horse's back. "How did this get so misplaced? Have you been thrown?" looking somewhat anxiously to see if Miss Brannan bore any marks of a fall.

"No, but I came very near it. Don shied at a big rattlesnake he saw beside the road, and I nearly

went off. His sudden start made the saddle slip,—it wasn't on very tight, for I saddled him to-day,—and I just let myself down quietly, and tried to arrange it; but Don's fright made him so nervous that he wouldn't stand still. He is usually very gentle."

"You say you saw a rattlesnake? Where was it?" looking keenly around on either side of the path.

"It ran into that clump of bushes," indicating a bunch of greasewood that grew near by.

"It must be killed," said Bill, hastily. "There, everything is all right now. Shall I help you to mount?"

"Not just now, if you are going to kill that snake. Would it not be better to let it go? You know that it is dangerous to attack one when thus concealed. Consider how hazardous it is," said Miss Brannan, timidly, lifting her earnest eyes to Maxley's face.

"Oh, there is no danger; you need not be alarmed." Spite of himself, Bill felt pleased at her solicitude. But, pooh! what did she care whether he, a strange miner, were bitten or not? It was probably all put on. "You had better allow me to place you in the saddle. His majesty may get away if I delay longer."

"No, I shall not go yet," and Miss Brannan's lips settled together firmly. "If you are determined to make the attack, I shall watch the battle."

"Very well, as you please."

Maxley armed himself with a stout stick, and advanced to the clump of bushes that was supposed to secrete the venomous reptile. Striking them a blow, a sharp, thrilling rattle was heard, and the tip of the snake's tail was seen rapidly vibrating in the air, thus giving Maxley some idea where to direct his blows. Fast and thick they fell for a moment, then the foe was vanquished, and Maxley raised the limp body on the stick, and threw it clear of the bushes. A little flushed, he turned to the spot where he had left Miss Brannan standing holding her horse. Miss Brannan was leaning upon the animal's neck, white as death.

"O, sir," she exclaimed, "how frightened I was when the horrible thing made the lunge at you! It very nearly struck your hand."

And she trembled visibly with excitement. Maxley laughed rather nervously as he saw how alarmed she had been for him.

"That's nothing. I've killed many another of his race, and come nearer to being bitten than that."

"Well, I am greatly obliged to you for your assistance," said Miss Brannan, making a violent effort for composure. "I will now ask you to give me a mount."

Maxley stooped, and offered his hand and shoul-

der, which she barely touched, bounding lightly to her place. He touched his hat, and was about to turn away, but Miss Brannan, leaning forward, held out her hand with a smile, and he could not do less than accept the proffered civility. The touch of her soft palm sent a curious thrill over him.

"Good-bye," said he, in response to her cordial "good-afternoon."

She turned her horse's head in the direction from which she had come, and cantered back to the camp, Bill's eyes following her erect, shapely figure, and noting the grace of her horsemanship. He sauntered up to the lifeless reptile, and severed the rattles from its body (there were thirteen of them), then he pursued his way homeward. Like many of the miners, he owned a rough cabin of one room which constituted his home,—a plain and lonely one. But then he was not in it much, except to sleep. It was always lively on the street and in the saloons; plenty of men lounging about at any hour of the day or night. An unwonted feeling of shame at the downward course he was treading possessed him as he sat in the doorway of his shanty smoking, after reaching home; and, for once, he did not go up street that evening, but passed the hours in solitude, alternately reading the papers and staring into vacancy—thinking. He recalled the earnestness with which the school-

teacher had besought him to run no risks, the trepidation she had evinced at his narrow escape from the reptile's fangs, the sweet smile and friendly look from her eyes when she bade him good-bye, the touch of her soft hand in his hardened palm; and it occurred to him that perhaps he had been wrong in judging all womankind alike, that it was possible that Miss Brannan might be as true and honest as she seemed. But then, Maud Hazeltine's manner had been even more calculated to inspire one with confidence than Miss Brannan's, as her face was more bewitchingly beautiful. And what was she, underneath her false mask, but a cold, calculating, ambitious trifler with the most sacred emotions of a man's heart, valuing a high position in society more than his ardent, abiding love? As his wife, she would have known no reasonable want. He could not have lavished upon her all the luxuries commanded by Theophilus Camperton. Theophilus Camperton! that gouty, bald-headed old *roue*! Filled with disgust, Bill Maxley knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and went to bed.

Miss Brannan stood in the doorway of the shanty which served the purpose of a school-house, and paused for a moment to look about her before ringing the bell to call in her flock from their afternoon recess. The sun poured down its scorching rays unobstructed by shade of any kind, and the barren slope

upon which the school-house was situated, with the valley and rugged mountains opposite lay bathed in a flood of light.

Shading her eyes from the glare with one hand, she rang the bell, and the scholars came trooping in and seated themselves on the rude benches. Just as she was turning away from the door, a man's figure appeared and a suave voice addressed her.

"Pardon me, madam, but I understand that visitors are permitted here. Will you allow me to come in for a few moments?"

He had his hat in his hand, and looked at the teacher with marked politeness, but Miss Brannan was not pleased with his appearance for all that, and felt reluctant to grant his request. But it was true that visitors were allowed, and, after a slight hesitation, she bade him enter, and placed a chair at his disposal. With profuse thanks, the stranger accepted the proffered seat, placed his hat on the floor, crossed one of his immaculately clad limbs over the other, and assumed an air of benevolent interest as he looked around at the wondering faces of the pupils. Miss Brannan proceeded with the customary routine of lessons, and, for a time, everything went on as usual, until she became conscious that the eyes of the visitor were almost constantly bent upon her, following her every movement about the room. This was not at

all agreeable, and ere long her heightened color and crested head evinced the displeasure she felt. The "few moments" lengthened into an hour, and when, at four o'clock, she dismissed her school, the intruder was still there.

"Permit me to offer you my card" said he, in insinuating tones

Miss Brannan looked at the bit of paste-board, but did not touch it, whereupon he laid it conspicuously on the table beside which he sat.

"I have seen you at a church, Miss Brannan," (so he knew her name), "and had the pleasure of listening to your divine voice."

Miss Brannan was the leading soprano of the little choir that gathered on Sunday in the adobe church. She particularly disliked such a broad compliment, and she thought it about time for Mr. Rupert Monmanier to take his departure. Hoping to accelerate that event, she said something about "having to look over some exercises," and sat down at a little distance to go through her task. Mr. Monmanier did not budge, but sat staring her persistently in the face. Unable to endure this impertinent *surveillance* longer, Miss Brannan gathered up her papers, and put on her hat. Observing preparations for departure, Mr. Monmanier, hat in hand, stepped outside the door, and awaited her egress.

"Good-day, sir," said she, somewhat sharply, after locking the door, walking rapidly away.

But she was not rid of him yet. He kept by her side, saying he was going in that direction, and annoyed her excessively with an increasing familiarity, which she met with a haughty silence. In sheer desperation, she turned her course toward the principal streets rather than to her boarding-place, and entered a dry-goods store, there ridding herself of her unwelcome companion, who gave a parting flourish, and proceeded on down the street. At the tea-table that night Miss Brannan related her adventure of the afternoon, and described the bold intruder.

"Oh, I know who he is," suddenly exclaimed Mr. Taylor, the head of the family. "He 's the man from New York who lately bought the Silver-Spray mine. I heard he was a fast chap. Broke the bank at the Crescent Saloon the other night. Well, he 'd better not try any of his shines on you. He 'll find that a mining camp is the worst place in the world to insult a woman. There 'd be a thousand men after him in no time if it was known that he troubled you or any other decent woman."

"I remember now," said Mrs. Taylor, "that I saw him staring at you in church last Sunday."

"Yes, he said he had the pleasure of hearing my divine voice there," replied Miss Brannan, scornfully.

" Well, he did pile it on pretty thick for a first acquaintance, and a scraped one at that," said Mr. Taylor. " Just let me know if he bothers you again."

A day or two later, after school was dismissed, Miss Brannan went around to the postoffice on her way home, and found as usual a long file of men in front of the delivery window, and stretching out into the street. They courteously made room for her to pass, and she stepped up to the ladies' window, and called for her mail. The previous day was Sunday, and, as the office was open only one hour on that day, she had failed to get her mail, and now there was an unusually large one. With three or four letters and several bunches of papers in her hands, beside some small parcels she had purchased on the way down street, she started for home. Arriving nearly at her destination, she paused a moment to look over her collection, and made the discovery that one letter was missing. She must have dropped it on the way, and she turned back to seek for it, but the handsome woman-hater was coming toward her, holding a letter in his hand, which proved to be the lost one.

" I observed this letter lying in the street," said Maxley, as he placed it in her hand, " and read the address, ' Miss Claribel Brannan.' As I knew that to be you, I determined to restore the letter to its owner, and hastened after you."

"Many thanks, sir. I should have felt sorry to have lost it, for it is from a very dear friend."

"Ah!"

And Maxley gave Miss Brannan a scrutinizing look which somehow brought the color in rosy flushes to her face, thus completing the mistaken impression in regard to the missive that Maxley had received from her last words, coupled with the bold, masculine superscription that had attracted his attention. At this juncture, Mr. Taylor came whistling around the corner.

"Hollo, Maxley," he called out, heartily. "Where do you keep yourself now-a-days? Haven't seen you for an age. Come in, boy, and sit a while."

"Thank you, Mr. Taylor, but I guess I can't stop to-night. It's about supper-time."

"Nonsense, come in and eat supper with us. Come now, no more excuses. It's a good while since I've had a talk with you, and I don't mean to let you go yet."

Finding it useless to attempt further remonstrance, Maxley succumbed to the force of circumstances, and followed his genial host into the house where Miss Brannan had already disappeared.

She soon entered the cozy little room where they were all sitting, looking very sweet and attractive in a neat, prettily flowered cambric, with cherry ribbons

at her throat, and nestling against her luxuriant dark hair. A face and figure that would grace the richest apparel, yet so fresh and "homey" in this plain attire that she called to Maxley's mind all sorts of vague dreams of domestic bliss, unmarred by the superficialities of fashionable life. He began to think that the writer of that letter was a very fortunate fellow.

Miss Brannan possessed courage, fortitude, and an indifference to the opinions of Mrs. Grundy, or she would not be out here on the frontier teaching school for a livelihood; and she was true to her lover, as the burning blush a few moments ago testified.

"Have you ever been introduced to Miss Brannan?" asked Mr. Taylor.

"No, not formally."

A presentation followed, and shortly after Mrs. Taylor called them out to supper. A variety of subjects were discussed, and then the conversation turned on the new minister.

"I think his sermon a week ago last Sunday was one of the finest I ever heard. Did you not like it?" remarked Miss Brannan, turning to Maxley, who sat at her left hand.

"I—really—I was not present. I seldom attend church," responded Maxley, with embarrassment.

"Oh, is that so? I really think you do not know what you miss. It is so much better to have Sunday

different from other days. Surely one sees enough of sin here during the week to get as far away from it as possible on the Sabbath. And it is a faint reminder of home, although everything is very rude and commonplace here compared with the magnificent appointments of Eastern churches,—the Word of God is the same."

Maxley started and grew pale as she mentioned home, and replied in a low tone,—

"I don't doubt but you are right. We miners fall into rough, careless ways after knocking around a while in uncivilized parts of the country."

"Then you want some one to set you right again," smiled Miss Brannan, as she folded her napkin, and they rose from the table.

Maxley's heart gave a sudden bound at her last remark, with its sweet, smiling look.

If only his life were not irretrievably wrecked, after all! If he might trust and love again, and cast aside the baleful habits that were dragging him down to ruin! But he must not forget that this woman, who so strangely occupied his thoughts, and who was breaking down the barriers of reserve behind which he had entrenched himself, was not free to win.

After Maxley had departed, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor declared to Claribel that they were never so delighted

to hear her say anything as they were when she asked Maxley about the sermon.

"Maxley's a fine fellow," said Mr. Taylor, "and I always felt uncommonly interested in him. I want to save him from going to ruin if I can. It is rumored that he was once very much attached to a beautiful girl, who went back on him for an old millionaire, and it made another man of him. He's got folks somewhere, I know, by the way he changed color when you spoke of home."

"I do believe you'll get him out to church yet," said motherly Mrs. Taylor. "You've made an impression on him, for he won't usually look at a woman, and he'll value your good opinion. If you work right I believe you'll get him to lead a different life."

Claribel thought she would try. She was more interested in this proud-faced miner than she cared for even her good friends, the Taylors, to know.

The next Sunday but one Bill Maxley did attend church. Claribel, in company with some friends, passed him on Saturday evening, and told him that she was on her way to choir rehearsal. The next morning, when she lifted her head after the opening prayer, and glanced aimlessly over the congregation, she gave a little start as she beheld Maxley's handsome face in one of the rows of chairs (for pews were as yet a thing unknown at Mineral Hill). He was

looking at her, and their eyes met. The pleased expression in hers showed him that she was gratified at his presence; and, when the choir arose to sing, and Miss Brannan's pure, powerful soprano soared above all others, he felt amply repaid for any sacrifice that he might have made in conforming to her desires. Mr. Rupert Monmanier was also a member of the congregation, and he kept his bold eyes, as usual, pertinaciously fixed on Miss Brannan's countenance. She was continually stumbling upon him at all sorts of odd corners, until it became evident that these unexpected *rencontres* were pre-arranged by him. He became a perfect bug-bear to her, yet had not so far violated the rules of decorum as to justify her in making any decided complaint against him.

One Sunday evening Mr. Taylor motioned to Bill Maxley across the church, as the people were going out (for Maxley was now a regular attendant), and, meeting him near the door, said,—

“ See here, Maxley, I want you to take my place, and beau the schoolma'am home. I'm called in another direction.”

Maxley quietly acquiesced in the arrangement, and offered his arm to Miss Brannan, who looked considerably astonished at this sudden change of escorts. Mr. Taylor went off chuckling to himself.

The church was half a mile from his house, and there would be quite a favorable opportunity for one of those *tete-a-tetes* that serve so well to draw congenial people nearer together. After this, whenever Mrs. Taylor accompanied her husband to evening meeting, as she generally did, it became in order for Mr. Maxley to escort Miss Brannan home. In these quiet interviews Maxley from time to time revealed bits of his past history, and finally was led on to speak of the home he had left, of the mother and sister who knew not his whereabouts. He said little about the faithless Maud, but from his scanty revelations Claribel could guess the rest, and from the depths of her heart she pitied him, and thought what a priceless treasure his love must be. Each enjoyed the other's company, still Maxley believed Claribel to be promised to another man, and she, knowing how passionately he had loved the fair one in the East, never placed any but a friendly construction on his attentions to her.

Darkness was gathering fast over Mineral Hill one evening when Miss Brannan was hurrying home from a visit to a sick pupil who lived on the outskirts of the camp. She disliked being out alone after dark, and was congratulating herself on being over the worst of the route, when footsteps suddenly came up behind her, and before she could turn around she

was seized in a powerful embrace, and hot kisses were pressed upon her burning cheeks.

"So, I have you now, my beauty. Come, give me one on that lovely mouth. I've but a taste yet."

It was Rupert Monmanier's hated voice. Claribel struggled desperately to break away from his strong arms, and gave a sharp cry of terror. The villain uttered a suppressed oath, and placed one hand firmly over her mouth to prevent further outcry. That one agonized shriek reached the ears of Bill Maxley, who was sitting in his cabin not far distant. The next instant he was out in the street, looking excitedly for the person in distress who had uttered it. Through the dim light he saw a woman struggling in the arms of a man, and a dozen miners rushing from their shanties to see what was going on. Maxley was the first to reach the spot. With unbounded amazement and wrath, he recognized in the parties the school-teacher, Miss Brannan, and that New York fop, Monmanier.

"Let go that lady, sir," thundered he, "instantly, or, by heaven, I'll shoot you in your tracks."

"You will, hey? I reckon two can play at that game."

And Monmanier, releasing Claribel, put his right hand in the breast of his coat. Maxley as rapidly drew his pistol, and the miners, who came up just

then, observing the critical aspect of affairs, and believing that shots would be exchanged before any one could interfere, deemed it expedient to keep out of the range of bullets. But Maxley had no intention of firing at Monmanier, since he had set Miss Brannan at liberty, unless compelled to do so in self-defense. Monmanier's blood was up, and he meant to give that lordly, meddlesome fellow a good dose of cold lead. He raised his pistol,—quicker than a flash, Claribel threw herself between him and Maxley, crying,—

“For God’s sake, do not shoot. You shall not kill him.”

“Oh, you are going to interfere, are you? I’ll be obliged if you’ll just step out of the way a minute.”

“Never! If you fire, the bullet shall go through my body before it reaches him.”

And she drew herself unflinchingly to her utmost height, and looked Monmanier steadily in the eye. Maxley made a move to place her gently to one side, but she resisted it.

“Oh, perhaps he’s a lover of yours. I didn’t think of that,” sneered Monmanier; “and that’s the reason you are so opposed to my advances.”

“Silence, you contemptible scoundrel!” cried Maxley.

Monmanier found himself powerless to resent the epithet, the miners having taken advantage of the conversation to creep up behind him, pinion his arms, and wrest the revolver from his hands.

"See here, my hearty," said Jake Peters, "don't you go for to try no more o' your blasted tricks. 'T a'n't no use. We've got the upper han's o' ye, an' ye mout as well give in fust as last."

"Jes' so, pard," chimed in Joe Walker, "ef this here low-lived 'pology for a man, that's meaner'n a skunk an' a cayote to boot, don't wish he'd never sot eyes on this here camp afore sun-up to-morrer mornin' I'm mistooken. Gentlemen, you kin give out word that there'll be a trial in jist one hour down to Racer Jim's barn. Lite out, now, an' tell the boys."

"All right," came in a chorus from the burly miners' throats.

And they sped hither and yon over the camp, spreading the news that a lady had been assaulted, and the perpetrator of the deed was to be tried by Judge Lynch that night. Like wild-fire the news swept through the streets, and hundreds of excited men were soon gathered at the point designated.

Uncouth though they were, it was a part of their rough miner's code never to allow an insult to a woman to pass unpunished. They might form low associations with the members of the *demi monde* who

followed up the mining camps, but a lady could not be treated with more courtesy if she were a queen. The fine-looking, gentle-mannered school-teacher was well known and greatly admired, and it looked as though it would go hard with her persecutor. Many insisted on "stringing up" Monmanier before day-break, but the less excitable portion of the throng did not favor bloodshed, but advocated his ejection from the camp. This measure was finally agreed upon, and the cowering prisoner was ordered to "shake the dust of Mineral Hill from his feet within twenty-four hours, if he valued his life."

It is needless to say that Mr. Rupert Monmanier settled up his business affairs right speedily, and on the morrow turned his back forever on the scene of his discomfiture.

As the miners led Monmanier away to his trial, Maxley fairly shook with agitation as he gazed upon Miss Brannan, so haughtily erect but a moment ago, now drooping and flushing, with eyes seeking the ground.

"My darling!" ejaculated he; "I must say it! How noble, how fearlessly brave in you to interpose your precious person between me and possible death! I shall never forget that revelation of the grandeur of your nature, never again say there is no such thing as a thoroughly good woman. In the years to

come, when you are a happy wife, wherever I may be, I shall reverence your memory. May the fortunate man who has won your affection guard and cherish it, as I would if it were in my possession. God bless you, noblest of women."

His voice trembled, and his eyes grew suspiciously moist. Claribel started, and averted her face to hide her confusion, when Maxley began to speak; but, as he continued, she raised her head and looked at him in amazement.

"What can you mean," she queried as he ceased, "by you references to some other man? You speak as if I were engaged, but I am not."

"You are not!" exclaimed Maxley. "Can that be true? Did not you imply as much when I returned to you your lost letter?" impetuously.

"Why, no, I did not. I think I stated that the letter was from a very dear friend, my old chum at school."

"But the masculine handwriting?"

"Oh, Lu has a habit of giving her letters to her husband to address. He is an editor, and writes a great deal at home."

"What a great mistake I have made! Is it too late to rectify it?" He came closer, and took both her hands in his. "Would it be possible for you to love me, my darling?"

Anxiously he awaited her answer. A moment's silence, and then she whispered,—

"Not only possible, but I already love you dearly."

The hands he grasped were quickly drawn about his neck, and he held her in a close embrace, his heart too full for utterance.

After a while they became conscious that they were standing in the middle of the street, that darkness had fallen close around them, and that Mr. and Mrs. Taylor would be feeling anxious at Miss Brannan's prolonged absence. So they started off arm-in-arm for Mr. Taylor's, exchanging as they went blissful lovers' confidences.

"You have turned me from the despicable course that I was pursuing," said Will. "I have not entered a gambling house for three weeks, and, by God's help, I never will again. I will strive henceforth to be worthy of my cherished wife. With you for my guiding-star, I surely can not fail."

Nor would he. Claribel Brannan's strong, well-poised nature was just the one to call forth all the good there was in Will Maxley, and she would never fail him. In seasons of prosperity and happiness, she would be the chief of all his blessings, in days of trial and suffering she would be his good angel. Better, far, for Will Maxley that his first love, Maud

Hazeltine, deserted him. In Claribel Brannan he found a wife immeasurably her superior. The Taylors were well pleased with the turn of affairs, having for some time had the idea that "it would be a good thing for Bel and Will to make a match."

When, two months later, Will sold a mine for twenty thousand dollars, there seemed no need of delaying their union, as that sum appeared as amply sufficient for comfort to Claribel as ten times the amount did to Maud Hazeltine. A few weeks afterward, the daily stage was besieged by a crowd of well-wishers, come to see "Bill Maxley" and his bride off on their wedding trip.

Jake Peters and Joe Walker were there, their faces beaming with approbation. "Who'd a thought it?" commented one of the bystanders; "that that air high-steppin' feller as wouldn't so much as look crostways at a woman would up and git hitched afore the year was out?"

"All aboard!" shouted the driver, mounting the box, and cracking his long whip. A plunge of the horses, a flourishing of bandanas in the air, three hearty cheers for the "woman-hater" and the "schoolmarm," and the lumbering old coach whirled around the corner, bound for the nearest railway station.

The sun was just dipping below the western horizon, casting a mellow light over the autumnal-hued

foliage and the pretty residences of that most beautiful of Boston suburbs, Rayville. A hack came rumbling down one of the broad streets, and drew up before a commodious mansion, of tasteful architectural design, surrounded by a well kept lawn, ornamented with neat flower-beds, a fountain splashing in the centre. The gayly tinted blossoms of summer had yielded to the blighting touch of an early frost, but chrysanthemums, everlasting, and other autumn flowers were yet in bloom. A sweet-faced girl looked out of one of the windows as the carriage stopped before the front gate.

"Mother," she called; "some one has come. There is a hack at the gate. Who can it be?"

"I don't know I'm sure," said Mrs. Maxley, a rather sad-faced woman of forty-five, whose smooth bands of black hair were thickly threaded with silver.

A tall gentleman alighted, and turned to assist a closely veiled lady from the carriage. Trunks and boxes were unstrapped by the driver, and appearances indicated that, whoever the travelers were, they had come to stay. The gentleman gave his arm to his companion, and they walked up the graveled path.

"O, mother," gasped the girl; "it is, it is Will! O, mother, Will has come back!" and the delighted girl flew to the hall door, and threw it open wide as the pair ascended the piazza steps. Mrs. Maxley

raised her eyes to heaven in a silent prayer of thanksgiving for the restoration of her only son, and followed close upon her daughter's footsteps.

"Mother!" said Will Maxley, catching sight of her matronly face ere she reached the door; "can you forgive and welcome back the wanderer?"

"My boy!" was the brief but tender answer, and she was folded in her son's strong arms.

Annie gave her brother a vigorous hug and a shower of kisses; then Maxley turned with pride to the young lady who had looked upon this family reunion with moistened eyes, and taking her by the hand, he led her to his mother.

"Mother," said he, "I have brought you a new daughter. Love her for my sake, for she has saved me from ruin."

"Bless her for that," said Mrs. Maxley fervently, as she received Claribel in a warm embrace, "but I know I shall love her for her own sake."

"This is Annie, of whom I have told you," continued Will. "Annie, this is your sister Bel."

"I am delighted," cried Annie, "to think you have brought home a wife! Dear Bel—you will let me call you so, won't you?—you don't know how lonely we have been."

"But you shan't be so any longer," said Will, as they entered a cozy parlor. "I am going to settle

down for life in the East. It is my wife's birthplace as well as mine, and here we will stay."

Happiness reigned again in the long-sad Maxley home. Mrs. Will created quite a sensation in the Rayville world, Mrs. Theophilis Camperton even casting decidedly jealous eyes on her discarded lover's stately wife ; for she had long since become disgusted with her captious, carnal-minded lord, and neither wealth nor jewels could bring contentment to her unhappy heart.

The motherless bride's cup of happiness was filled to overflowing with the affection of her new-found parent and sister. And Will Maxley never ceased to bless the day on which he gazed with critical eyes, after the "school-ma'am of Mineral Hill."



THE TRIALS OF JONATHAN MOLLIFY.

JONATHAN MOLLIFY was in despair. He was ready to take an affidavit that no more hopelessly miserable specimen of the *genus homo* existed than he, on this beautiful Monday morning, *Anno Domini* 2010, in that rarest of favored countries,—the Golden State. This lugubrious condition of affairs was nothing new; had it been, he might have plucked up courage and hoped for brighter days in future. But, years ago, he had given up all faith in such well-worn adages as “The darkest cloud has a silver lining;” “Never was so long a night but was vanquished by the light,” *et cetera*. Stuff and nonsense! The light was a long time coming, in his case, and he didn’t see where it was coming from, unless the gates of a brighter world than this mundane sphere should mercifully open before him. It was all on account of Maria, this darkness and chaos and misery, and as for any lifting of the cloud in that direction, one might as well look for a gold mine in the bottom of Salt Lake. Maria had the upper hand, and she held the reins taut and firm. They had been in her

possession — how long? It seemed an eternity, but it could not be but a half-dozen years or so, reckoning by little Jonathan, who was a babe in the cradle when the movement was crowned with success.

"Movement?" you repeat. Why, yes, the woman's right's movement now in full swing from shore to shore of this glorious republic, and sweeping Maria Mollify along with it, well-nigh to the annihilation of her true and trusty spouse, Jonathan. Here it was Monday morning, and Maria, despite her long residence on the Pacific Coast, positively would not forget the principle inculcated in her youth, among the far-famed Yankees, that, whate'er betide, Monday is wash-day. Yea, though the skies fall, the week's washing must be done, and Monday is the appointed time. Jonathan was not sensible of any decided objection to this programme, provided Maria would interview the tub and wash-board herself, but, alas! this was not the order of the day in the new dispensation. Maria was up and away, bright and early, on official business connected with the annual convention of the Grand Union Female Association of Liberty and Equality, which was announced to begin at nine A. M. of this very day, continuing through the week; and Jonathan could still hear her metallic voice calling from the buggy, as she gave the dejected steed a cut of the whip, and rattled out of the yard.

"Hurry up, now, and get that wash out a dryin' in some kind of season. And don't let Jeremiah get into mischief. And remember, I shall be home to dinner at twelve o'clock, sharp!"

Shades of Erebus! what a change in that woman's voice since those foolish days, ten years ago, when they two went "sparking" down by the river bank, where the violets grew the thickest, and the birds caroled the sweetest, as if in sympathy with the lovers who strolled through their shady retreats. Foolish days! yet Jonathan liked to recall them. But for the memory of them, he sometimes feared he would throw off the galling yoke, and launch into the sea of eternity.

Who could have foreseen such a contingency as this? who realized the startling changes, arising from progressive times, which had metamorphosed sweet Maria Moulton into the present terrible Maria Mollify? Not Jonathan Mollify, or never would he have slipped his neck into the noose matrimonial,—that was as certain as tradesmen's bills at New Year's. But there was no disputing the fact,—women were now voters, office-holders, and proprietors generally; and perhaps it was a natural sequence of centuries of—so-called—oppression that they carried their new dignities and responsibilities in a very high-handed manner, assuming the authority in domestic matters

as well as the lion's share in political affairs. Anyhow Maria Mollify was not going to be outdone by any one else, either at home or abroad. She gloried in the opportunity to display abilities that lay dormant and unrecognized prior to that grand and memorable day when the emancipation of the female sex was legally effected. Ah, well-a-day ! it had been rough sailing for the discomfited masculines ever since, especially for those who, like himself, were so unfortunate as to be bound hard and fast by the ties of wedlock, to a bright and shining star, a leader invincible and undaunted, in the new dominion. Maria's services were constantly in demand, and her time was consequently too valuable to be spent in obscurity at home. Jonathan being of less note and usefulness in the political world, must render himself of service at the hearthstone. This Maria thought eminently proper and consistent. It was, therefore, Jonathan who washed the dishes, cooked the meals—on time, too, or he rue'd his tardiness—tended the babies, and otherwise kept oiled and in motion the machinery of the household. And this it was which had transformed him from a joyous bridegroom to a disheartened spiritless shadow of a man.

“ Ouch ! ou-ou-ou ouch ! ” came a mighty howl from the kitchen. “ Papa ! papa ! I want my papa ! ow-ow-ow-ow ! ”

"Great goodness! what's that child into now? Maria charged me to look after him, and I forgot all about it. Blast it all! Hush up, Jerry, can't you? Don't make such an all-fired racket."

No more reveries for Jonathan Mollify. In the middle of the cluttered kitchen, his hands, face and dress besmeared with soft soap, the bucket from which it had been abstracted upset on the floor, stood the originator of the howl in question, a chubby, two-year old boy, and as disgusted a looking one as ever tampered with presumable sweets.

"Me sit, papa," wailed the child, with contorted face; "me dretful sit. Boo-hoo-o-o!"

"Where are you sick?" queried papa, drawing the disconsolate object toward a wash-basin, and proceeded to remove the brown-hued covering from his lineaments. "What business had you meddling with that soap-bucket, any how, I'd like to know? Never saw such young ones! It isn't me they take after."

Here Jerry gave unmistakable indications of the locality of the alleged sickness, by saying:

"Me stummit, papa, me stummit. Boo-hoo-o-o-o!"

"Jeremiah Mollify, didn't you know any better than to eat that stuff? Well, this is a mess. No wonder you're sick! That washing won't get out in a hurry, I'm thinking, with you to attend to."

"Papa toss! Don't, papa, be toss to Jerry. Jerry sit."

And the papa loved his little boy too well to hold out long in the face of genuine distress.

But the sick one had to be coddled and comforted and put to sleep, and all the time the sun was mounting higher in the heaven, and the clothes lay soaking in the tubs. The child's troubles forgotten in slumber, Jonathan plunged into the work of the day in good earnest. It was not long, however, before another interruption came, in the shape of a dripping boy of six or seven, also the possessor of a strong pair of lungs, which he was using actively.

"Now, what in creation's the matter with you?" demanded the irate father. "Where've you been to get so wet? Speak this minute, Jonathan! How came you out of school?"

"I—I—went d-down t-to the fish-pond, 'long the other boys, 't recess, an'—an'—Jake Hudson, he p-pushed me in."

"Well, Jake Hudson had better mind his own business, or I'll give him something some day that he won't like. And you can just keep away from that fish pond after this. If I ever hear of you going there again I'll see about it! Now I've got to stop and hunt up dry clothes for you, or else you'll be down with sore throat or something, and then I'll

never hear the last of it. Stop your bawling, and come along into the house."

Jonathan, junior, attended to, the advancing hand of the clock warned Mr. Mollify that the dinner hour was at hand, and no preparations had been made for the meal.

"Twelve o'clock sharp, Maria said," he groaned ; "and she'll be here, sure as fate. Seems to me I hear the rattling of the wagon now, and there a'n't any kindlin' chopped nor nothin ready. Dear, dear, I 'm in for it."

"It" may be a mysterious word to the reader, but it was not to Jonathan Mollify. "It" in his vocabulary, was fraught with meaning, and that meaning was indissolubly connected with the lordly Maria's tongue. Alive to the exigencies of the case, he trotted around endeavoring to make a good show of his morning's work,—for well he knew it would undergo inspection from Argus eyes,—stringing part of the clothes conspicuously upon the line, scrabbling together and out of sight some of the rubbish that lay in confusion about the kitchen floor; and, the perspiration trickling down his face, was frantically chopping kindling when Maria Mollify drove briskly into the yard. An ominous look settled upon her countenance as she espied the flurried Jonathan, and conjectured that her orders had not been faithfully

executed. Hitching the horse, and striding judicially into the kitchen, she surveyed the situation, and her displeasure found prompt utterance.

"What! no dinner ready, and the fire not even built! Jonathan Mollify, you lazy, good-for-nothing man, what have you been doing all the forenoon? Not more 'n half the wash out, either," going to the door, and giving a contemptuous sniff at the clothes-line. "Well, if this is n't enough to provoke a saint. Here I 've been hard at work ever since I opened my eyes this morning, and now I can't get a bite of anything to eat. I do believe I shall faint away."

She sank into a chair with an air of profound exhaustion and pitiful martyrdom. Jonathan grabbed the vinegar bottle, and thrust it under her nostrils so vehemently that she recoiled with indignation.

"Don't faint, Maria, mercy on us, don't faint! I 'll have dinner ready in five minutes. It 's been a dreadful unlucky day, Maria, and I could n't do no better; I could n't, positively."

What on earth was the matter with Maria's nose? It never used to loom up like that. Why, it was frightful. Was it going to keep on developing in like ratio in the years to come? Jonathan shrank from the contemplation of such a possibility.

His conciliating tone did not produce the desired

effect. Overcoming her momentary weakness, Maria rose in wrath unappeasable.

"Don't you stand gawkin' at me another minute, Jonathan Mollify. I've had to bear enough to-day at the convention without being annoyed at home. Hard as I've worked, and as much money as I've spent in the cause, if it a'n't maddening to have another woman—a mere stranger, and of no account at all, except for her pretty face and load of jewelry—put above me, and made president of the day, I'd like to know what is? It's the first time since the society was organized that anybody's got ahead of me like that, and I just won't stand it. Do you hustle round and make that fire, or I'll know the reason why."

What was the reason that Jonathan could not budge?

"Do you hear me? Get up and make the fire. It's late."

A sudden and astonishing spirit of bravery pervaded the down-trodden man. He felt like a lion. He was n't going to stand any more of Maria's hen-pecking,—no, not one atom more. Not even though she had the audacity to shake him, and yell in his ear the same old refrain. "Get up Jonathan! get up and make the fire."

"I'll be cussed if I will," he roared. "I'll never touch that blamed old stove again as long as I live.

I 've stood this sort of thing long enough. If you want a fire, build it yourself."

"Oh, dear, dear, I never thought you'd speak so to me, Johnnie," grieved a plaintive voice.

"You can 'Johnnie' me as much as you like, but you can't pull the wool over my eyes that way. I tell you I won't do it. Build it yourself."

"There, now, it's true, it's true what Sarah Snifkins told me, that I was a fool to get married, for my husband would domineer over me in less than six months, and make me do all the chores. I got mad at her, and said I knew my Johnnie never would do any such thing; but now you have, you have, and I 'me going right straight h-home to my m-ma!"

John Mollify sat up in bed, and stared at his weeping wife.

"Why—what—where am I, anyhow? Where's Jonathan and Jeremiah, and the rest of the babies? Isn't it 2010?"

"Two thousand ten, you crazy man! Of course not. And what do you mean by talking about the babies? We havn't any babies, Johnnie."

Maria blushed rosy red, and gazed in wide-eyed astonishment at her bewildered husband.

"And you're not President of the Grand Union Female Association of Liberty and Equality? Let me see your nose."

Maria by this time had serious doubts as to the man's sanity. She was beginning to feel afraid of him. Her nose, indeed.

"Cunning as ever," he said, investigating the member. "By George, Maria, I believe I must have been dreaming. I say, ducky, what were you crying about? Was I cross to you? Never mind, pet, you know I didn't mean it. I was asleep. Kiss and make up."

"O, Johnnie, how you did frighten me! I'm ever so glad it was only a dream. But you'll have to get up, quick, for you've overslept—we're half an hour late. It's those oysters, I know. I told you last night not to eat too many."

John dressed himself hastily, an abstracted look still upon his face.

"What were you dreaming about, Johnnie?"

Mr. Mollify was intently hunting for his other boot.

"I say, Johnnie, what were you dreaming about?"

"Oh, nothing," pulling the missing article out from under the bed; "that is, I don't remember. I never can remember my dreams, can you?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes," asserted the curious wife. "I wish you would try and remember this one. You acted so strangely."

"Don't you want to go down to Norwell's to-day, and buy that crushed-strawberry hat you admired so much yesterday?"

An abrupt change of subject, but an agreeable one.

"O you darling, of course I do! Can I really have it?"

"Yes," said John, "I feel as if I'd like to make you a present. That's because you are such a good little wife. You'd better go the first thing, before any one else gets it."

"You dear boy!" cried Maria delightedly. "Because I don't really need it, you know. But it's such a beauty."

John said nothing, but wrestled with the kitchen stove, congratulating himself that he was only six months married, and that his wife didn't know the difference between nomination and election, or any other political terms.



REUBEN HALL'S CHRISTMAS.

"CHRISTMAS! fol-de-rol! What's Christmas more'n any other day? I've no money to spare for such foolish notions. I reckon what we have year in 'n year out 's plenty good enough for any day, no matter 'f 'tis Christmas."

"But, Reuben, the children would be *so* pleased." Here the span of bays broke into a sharp trot urged by Farmer Hall's relentless whip, and the old market wagon, devoid of springs or cushions, rattled and jolted so persistently that further conversation was rendered impossible. Good Mrs. Hall could do naught but cling desperately to the seat and gaze reproachfully at her obdurate husband. Not another word spoke Reuben until they reached home, and then, ignoring the subject uppermost in her heart, he bluntly remarked: "Reckon you'll have to spin around lively to get supper in season," offering no assistance as she cautiously descended from her lofty perch.

The door opened quickly and a brace of blue-eyed, fair-haired girls of fourteen years of age ran

gaily to meet the tired woman, and took the packages of tea and coffee, soap and candles, and other useful articles, from her arms. Her worn, sad face lighted up as she followed her twin daughters into the warm kitchen, there to behold the table nicely spread for supper and the bread she had expected to mold and bake, in beautifully browned loaves upon the cake-board.

"I did it myself, mother," said Gertrude, delightedly, "and it's just as nice! I think it's such fun to make bread."

Little Mrs. Hall made up her mind that if it were not "fun" to come home and find nothing to do till milking-time, it was something akin to it, and her voice was a little unsteady as she praised the girls for their thoughtfulness, and then inquired for Johnnie.

"Johnnie? Oh, he's in the stable, I guess. He stays in there every day, but I can't think what he does it for."

"Mamma," interposed Katie, "did you say anything to father about Christmas?"

"Yes, dear, I did, but I'm afraid, girls, you will have to get along as usual. I couldn't seem to make any impression on him."

"Now, I call that too mean for anything," sobbed Katie, "when everybody else has such good times, too." A heavy footstep, and the opening door

silenced the words upon her lips, and Johnnie, a sturdy boy of eleven, having made his appearance, the family sat down to supper.

Reuben Hall would have been greatly astonished if anyone had told him he was not a good man. He considered himself an exemplary citizen, attended church oftener than some of his neighbors, worked hard and saw that his family always had plenty to eat and drink. It did not occur to him that, while providing for their most pressing temporal wants, he withheld entirely too much for which their souls hungered. He did not realize that his patient wife would willingly have gone without food for a day for the sake of an endearing word that never came, or a fond look from the eyes that rested so indifferently upon her. He had no patience with the longings of his children for beautiful surroundings, pretty clothes, entertaining books, pictures, and the like. "All fol-de-rol!" was his favorite comment, and the well-worn money pouch was never opened in response to entreaties for such pleasures.

The mother had broached the subject of celebrating Christmas while in the neighboring city, marketing with her husband, but, as has been perceived, without the desired result. Reuben Hall had a comfortable bank account, and was making money on his

ranch, but he had nothing to spare for Christmas “foolery,” as he termed it.

A week passed. One morning Mr. Hall made his appearance in the kitchen with a troubled countenance.

“Mother,” he queried, “can’t you fly around and catch the ten o’clock train for Bay City?”

“Mercy on us, Reuben!” and down went a shower of milk on the astonished cat. Hastily setting down the pan, Mrs. Hall interrogated. “What do you want me to go to Bay City for?” It was indeed a strange request for her husband to make, since he seldom thought it necessary for anyone but himself to leave home, with its duties.

“It’s about that business with Symonds—he sends word it must be attended to to day, and you know what Symonds is—he won’t wait for nobody. I’d oughter go myself, but it’s no use, I can’t with all that seeding to be done and the men in the field a-ready. So you just put on your bunnit and I’ll drive you right over to the depot. Be quick; I don’t want to lose no more time ‘an I can help.”

Mrs. Hall, considerably flustered, complied with her husband’s request, and in ten minutes was speeding on her way to the station, three miles distant, while Gertrude and Katie assumed, to the best of their ability, the tasks to be performed in her absence.

The day wore on, and the early twilight fell over the broad valley. The train from Bay City was not due until seven o'clock. Supper was served promptly by the girls, and then the farmer, sitting outside the door enjoying his pipe preparatory to the drive over to the station, in the mild December air peculiar to Southern California, overheard a conversation between his daughters as they busily set the kitchen to rights, taking care to reserve in a warm place for "mother" the choicest portions of the meal. They evidently had no suspicion that he was within hearing, and their outspoken comments strangely disturbed the involuntary listener.

"I just wish father would do different," said Katie, "we should love him so much more, and I'm sure mother would be happier."

"Yes," indeed," replied Gertrude, "only last night I found her crying in the west room, with a lot of old letters in her lap. She tried to hide them under her apron, but I coaxed her to let me peep at them, and what do you think they were? Old love-letters of father's, and they must have been ever so sweet, for I caught sight of 'dears' and 'darlings' enough for anybody! Would you believe from the way father treats mother now that he ever made love to her? I know she was thinking of the difference, and that was what made her cry. I don't think a

man has any business to promise a girl all sorts of things to make her happy, and then take no pains to keep his word, but just make a servant of her," exclaimed Katie, impulsively. "Did you ever in your life hear father call mother a pet name? And see how thoughtless he is about her health! If he won't let *us* have a good time, I do wish he would be more kind to her."

Gertrude, whose temperament was more sedate, said: "It is not nice of us to be talking so about our father, but I can't help wondering sometimes how he would feel if mother should die."

A shock went over Reuben Hall's sturdy frame. "If mother should die!" Visions, hitherto strangers to his thoughts, flitted through his brain. It was not impossible—"mother" *might* die—and what then? In one great rush of awakened feeling, the man realized how empty life would be to him without the chosen companion of his early manhood and matured years. The anger which had arisen at the harsh criticism of his children faded away, and was replaced by a chaos of thoughts which were very disagreeable to entertain. Thus aroused, and condemning himself for having allowed his wife to take such a sudden journey, he harnessed the bays and departed for the station to meet her. It was now quite dark, save for the twinkling stars which thickly studded

the heavens, but the faithful horses knew the road well, and soon landed him at the depot, where a few loungers were awaiting the coming of the train. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, but no shrill whistle broke the stillness of the night. The station master began to look perplexed.

"Where's yer train?" hallooed an idler.

"You know as much about it as I do," was the answer. "It ought to have been here ten minutes ago." Another wait, and then everybody began to get excited.

"Something's happened sure as you live," declared Nathen Bent, a neighbor of the Halls, to Reuben.

"Great God! I'm afraid there has—and my wife is on the train." The man shook like a leaf, and great drops of perspiration coursed down his face.

"You don't say!" and a circle gathered around Reuben. "It looks mighty bad, and that's a fact, but don't give up heart yet, neighbor."

The click of the telegraph at last put an end to the dreadful suspense, but the tidings it brought were sad indeed: "Collision between Mendon and Langley. Seven killed and twelve injured." Not a word more! nothing to cool the fever heat in every breast.

Reuben Hall groaned in anguish of spirit. It seemed impossible that his wife could be uninjured,

while the chances were great that she was among the killed. Few, if any, could have escaped unhurt, for there never were many passengers on this train—often less than the number reported as victims of the disaster. How could it have happened? Oh, if he had not sent her on the fateful journey! If he had gone himself, as he ought, seeding or no seeding, she would now be safe at home by the fireside, while he—where would he be? The strong man trembled, and confessed to his accusing conscience that he was not as well prepared to go before the tribunal of Heavenly justice as his faithful wife. By a chance turn of Fortune's wheel, he was spared this time, but his summons might come in an equally unsuspected manner. Would it find him in readiness?

"They'll telegraph back to Bay City, likely, for a relief train," said someone, "and then they'll come on down this way. They'd orter be here in a couple of hours." Two hours! What an eternity of misery can be condensed in that short space of time! Two hours before Reuben Hall could know whether his wife, who never before seemed so dear, still existed. Who shall portray the emotions which were experienced by the unhappy man in that period of waiting for the knowledge which might be so crushing when it came?

Gertrude, Katie and Johnnie, sitting in the bright

kitchen, listening for the familiar rattle of the old market wagon, grew sleepy and finally alarmed at the non-appearance of their parents. Nine o'clock, ten struck, still the welcome sound came not. The appetizing supper prepared for the tired mother dried in the oven, and the unheeded fire went out. A chill crept over the little room, and over the hearts of the frightened children. The hands crept slowly around to eleven; once more the clock struck, still the silence was unbroken, save by sobs and hushed words. All at once Gertrude sprang up and cried, "What are we sitting here doing nothing for, when father and mother may have been thrown out, and no one to help them! I'm going over to Mr. Norton's." They were all too excited to reflect that, had such an accident occurred, the horses would probably have come straight home; and Gertrude opened the door to carry out her purpose of arousing the neighbors when—could she believe her ears—far away she heard a faint rumble on the depot road. "Listen, Katie; listen, Johnnie," she cried, quivering with excitement, while brother and sister flew to the open door. The rumble grew louder. "It is, it is, they are coming at last," and they fairly danced for joy.

Yes, coming at a pace to which the steady bays were seldom put—coming with a rattle and flourish up to the garden gate.

Down sprang Reuben Hall with more activity than he had shown for years, then turned and carefully lifted from the high seat a pale, exhausted little woman. What was the girls' surprise to see their father carry her quite to the kitchen door, where he deposited his burden, and said in a low tone to which his children's ears were not accustomed, "Don't bother your mother with no more questions, but get her right to bed, and fix her a cup of hot tea. She's dead beat out." Then, seeing the looks of wonder and the traces of tears, he continued: "There's been a smash-up on the road, and it's a wonder your mother wa'nt hurt. She's been doing for them that was till she can't hardly stand. I 'spose you got scared, didn't ye?"

It was a happy, thankful family that gathered around the breakfast table at an unusually late hour the next morning. Little Mrs. Hall looked like a new being, despite her fatigue, with such a pretty pink flush on her cheeks, and such a bright light in the eyes that looked almost with girlish shyness over to the face of her husband. The remembrance of the fervent embrace, like those of old which she had long missed, that he had given her on the arrival of the relief train at the station, was fresh in her mind; also, the agitation he had shown, and the deference of his manner ever since. Her heart had not been

so light for years, and surely no breakfast was ever so good as this! A corresponding change had crept over Mr. Hall's countenance. The children wondered that they had never thought their father fine-looking before, and rejoiced at the removal of the cloud which had rested over the household.

It would be folly to assert that Reuben Hall never for a moment relapsed into the old ways—human nature is weak, and the force of habit strong—but he pulled himself up short when he realized his remissness and strove to make amends by redoubled kindness towards his family.

Christmas came, and proved the merriest that the Halls had ever known. In the first place, there was a row of stockings, stuffed full and running over, hanging by the sitting room fire-place, and more good things came out of those receptacles than I can begin to enumerate. Then, about ten o'clock, who should drive up to the door, in a brand new, covered carriage, but Mr. Hall, and the bays, in shining, silver-mounted harness, held their heads high in seeming consciousness of their improved appearance.

"Thought we might as well have a decent turn-out," said Reuben, "seein' the old market wagon 's done duty so long." And then he commanded them all to "git on their best fixin's and ride over to aunt Sarah's" to a turkey dinner that had been prepared

for their coming. And when they got home there was the best room so metamorphosed that Mrs. Hall stood in the middle of it and looked around her in bewilderment. Actually a bright new carpet and set of furniture, and — here the girls screamed with delight — a parlor organ, with a music book open upon it. Johnnie came in from the stable, where he had spent so much time of late, bearing a nicely-stained set of book shelves for his mother, and a carved bracket for each of his sisters. "How ever did you do it, Johnnie?" asked Katie.

"With my bracket saw that I bought out of the money I made with my chickens," he answered, proudly. The chickens referred to were a brood belonging to a hen which Johnnie had raised since the day it came feebly out of its shell and been deserted by its stronger mates and hard-hearted mother.

"After this you shall all have chickens of your own, and do what you please with the money," said the father.

It grew dark, and then Mr. Hall made a new, and for him strange, proposition: "Let's all go over to the village to the festival," he urged. "Come, we might as well make a complete thing of it, as long as we're celebratin'. The neighbors are goin', and there'll be fun likely."

So off they went; sure enough there was "fun,"

and when at last they settled themselves to sleep, it was with the firm belief that never before was there a happier day than Reuben Hall's Christmas.



MRS. BRIGHTON'S BURGLAR.

THE clock struck three. As its silvery chimes ceased, a slight noise was heard in the handsome apartment where Mrs. Brighton lay sleeping. The light from the hall lamp shone dimly through the half open door upon the bed and the dressing case beside it, leaving the rest of the room in darkness.

A stalwart figure stood before the mirror, swiftly but silently turning over the contents of a drawer. It was the opening of this drawer which had disturbed the stillness of the night so faintly. Mrs. Brighton opened her eyes just in time to see a diamond ring disappear in the burglar's pocket. His hands closed upon a dainty purse.

"Who steals my purse steals trash!" The dark figure started. Whence came that clear and quiet voice? He glanced apprehensively at the bed, and met the gaze of a brown-eyed woman who seemed as unmoved as if she were sitting in her parlor talking with an ordinary caller. The intruder stared dumbly.

"Fact!" continued the calm voice. "I'll prove

it to you ; open it ! ” And now the tone was commanding.

Mechanically the burglar obeyed. A solitary nickel dropped from the purse.

“ Now, sir,” said the lady, in a firm though not unfriendly tone, “ aren’t you ashamed of yourself, breaking into a person’s house like this ? ”

The man hesitated. “ Tell the truth,” said Mrs. Brighton, imperiously.

“ Yes, lady, I am,” he blurted out in an impulsive, honest way.

“ Then take off that mask.”

The man started. “ No ! ” he said.

“ Take it off ! ” insisted Mrs. Brighton. “ I do like to have my own way. Oblige me, and you will not be sorry for it.”

He pulled it off, and looked at her with embarrassment and shame. She saw a gaunt face, young, blue-eyed, and yet hardened into the lineaments of a confirmed criminal.

“ Ah ! ” she murmured to herself, “ I thought it quite likely.” Then, aloud, “ I wish you would tell me how you chanced to take up this hazardous and dishonest life.”

“ I haven’t been in it long, ma’am,” he said, very low. “ I was driven to it. I had lost my job and

couldn't get anything to do—and—and—one must have something to eat, ma'am."

"True! And so you thought you would help yourself to the property of other people. But haven't you lost something in the process?"

"I hadn't anything to lose, ma'am."

"You had honesty! a clear conscience! approbation of the great Judge! Was it worth while to part with them, even to assuage hunger?"

"I hadn't thought of it that way, ma'am."

"I realize how hard it has been for you," said Mrs. Brighton, "as much as anyone can realize it who has not experienced such privation. I know that you were desperate and tempted. Your face tells me that crime does not come to you naturally. Have you a mother?"

The young man quivered. "She is dead," he replied.

"Perhaps her spirit is hovering over you at this moment. Would you like to have her see you commit a robbery?"

"My God, no!"

"Then, take my advice, and try once more to lead an honest life. Act as if your mother were conscious of every thought and deed—she may be, for aught that any of us know. Pray for help and guid-

ance. Don't be ashamed to pray, young man. Will you try?"

Tears rolled down the stranger's face as he bowed his head—he could not speak.

"I will give you a little starter, and show you that I trust you. Take the cover off that bon-bon box—there—beside the cushion, at your right." Several bright gold pieces lay within. "Take one," she said.

"I can't take anything from you, ma'am," and the young fellow dropped the diamond ring among the gold pieces.

"Yes, you can, as a gift from me, when I wish it very much. I set aside a tenth for benevolent work, always, and I am sure that you need assistance as much as any one I know. Only make good use of it, and never, never break into anybody's house again."

"God bless you, ma'am," he said, as he took out one only one—of the shining coins. "I'll never forget your kindness, and I'll do the best I can."

"Good-bye, then, and hurry, for I hear someone coming." He swung himself out of the open window, and clambered down the trellis, as Mrs. Brighton's servant came along the hall with a light in her hand, and peered into her mistress' room.

"I thought I heard somebody talking, ma'am," she said.

"Very likely it was I, Martha, babbling in my sleep. Too much supper, no doubt."

"All right, ma'am," replied Martha, somewhat ambiguously, and departed to her couch.

"Why wasn't I afraid?" mused Mrs. Brighton, as the silence of night once more closed in around her. "I always supposed I would be dreadfully scared if any one broke into the house, yet I never felt calmer in my life than when I discovered that I was not alone. It must have been some occult force that impressed me with the fact that there was no danger. Why, only last evening I was reading of a terrible murder committed by a robber in the house. It would not be wise to try philanthropy with that kind of a person. But this poor boy needs help. I believe he will come out all right."

With a sigh of pity for the vast hordes of unfortunates to whom life is a bitter struggle in a world of plenty, Mrs. Brighton fell asleep.

It was a perfect day, some years later, and Mrs. Brighton availed herself of it to pay a long-deferred call upon a friend living in the suburb of Mayville, to which the electric line which passed her house had lately been extended. The car stopped at her signal, and the conductor stood ready to assist her

on board. He gave her a scrutinizing glance, one that was almost keen in its intensity, as he helped her up the steps, and she observed that he was an honest-faced young man, with a cheery, healthy look and a pleasant voice. One by one the passengers left the car, until Mrs. Brighton was the only one remaining inside, for her friend lived a little beyond the terminus of the road, in a thinly settled region.

Suddenly the conductor walked up to her. "May I speak to you, madam?" he queried.

"Certainly," she replied, with some surprise.

"You do not recollect ever having seen me before?"

She scanned him closely. "No," she said.

"I am the burglar who broke into your house four years ago."

"Indeed," ejaculated Mrs. Brighton. "I see the resemblance now you speak of it. The moustache changes you."

"I am changed in many ways, thanks to your counsel and assistance, madam. I hoped I might tell you so, sometime. I took this route because it passed your house, and have always looked for you. The money that you gave me supported me until I found work. I got into good company, and finally I got married—yes, I have a wife and baby now."

"I am so glad," was all that Mrs. Brighton could say, but her face shone with pleasure.

"I told my wife all about it, and she just reveres you, madam, as I do myself. I wish you could see her and the baby."

"Bring them to my house, sometime," said Mrs. Brighton, as the car stopped.

"Thank you, I will," replied the conductor, helping her to the ground with the utmost care, and touching his hat as she turned away.

"Bread cast upon the waters does sometimes return," thought Mrs. Brighton, with a light heart, as she hastened toward the home of her friend.



THROUGH NIGHT TO LIGHT.

“MOTHER! Mother! Let me see your face; nay, do not grieve so; I am not afraid to die, and God knows best; there must be some good reason for this—something you will know, though it seems hard now. Dear mother, He will not leave you comfortless—He has promised it.”

“Oh! my child, how can I look calmly on and see you pass out of my life, stricken down on the very threshold of manhood—my hope! my joy! my one incentive for existence! What is there left for me when you are gone? I can not face the future—it is all dark. I do not want to grope my way through the gloom. Oh, that I might die, too!”

“Lay your head down by mine, mother—so; now kiss me. You always used to be so strong; it is not like you to give way so utterly. If I, your little boy, whom you guided so carefully along the crooked ways of this world, do not fear to enter that unknown world above, should not you be brave? It will be but a little while ere we shall meet again. Think of that joyous union, where we shall live in perfect hap-

piness, our trials at an end! Think of that, dear mother, and your burden will grow lighter.

"Henry, I will try to be strong; your faith and courage rebuke me. But if anything, everything else, had been taken, and my son had been left me. I can not see yet why I should be deprived of the solace of my declining years, or how I can live without you, my darling."

"There will be a way provided, mother; I am sure of that. And I can go easier now that the ranch is paid for, and I know that you have a good home."

"Ah, my son, how you have worked to provide your mother with this home! And I felt so proud of my manly boy and so happy in the expectation of spending the remainder of my life in this quiet spot, with grandchildren clustering at my kees. Oh! what is it, Henry?"

"Only a little twinge of pain—it's over now; and I was thinking of Annie—dear Annie. You'll tell her now how devotedly I loved her, and that I was only waiting till the load of debt was off our shoulders before asking her to come and make us both happy. She would have been a good daughter to you, mother; but it was not to be, and I will not rebel. I hope she'll be happy and think of me sometimes when she has formed other ties. And, mother, there's something else I want to speak about."

“ What is it, my child ? ”

“ It is about you and father.”

“ Do not rake up the past, Henry. He has chosen his path, and I have chosen mine. Long years ago they diverged so utterly that no trace of either to the other was visible. I do not want to think of your father now; I want to think only of you, my poor, crushed, dying boy, in the few short hours that I may keep you with me.”

“ But I can not die happily with you two unrecconciled. O, mother, won’t you promise me something? Won’t you send father a kindly message? Won’t you take the first step? I believe it would all come right. He did wrong, but he was sorry afterward, and you would not forgive him. Do this for me, mother. Write to father.”

“ Henry, it can not be. I do not know where he is, and if I did, I could not write to him. He forfeited all claim upon his wife when he let the gaming-table conquer his duty to his family, and sacrificed his home, his reputation — everything a true man should live for — in order to gratify a degrading passion. He did beg me to take him back — so does every weak drunkard and gambler in the land, and their vows are not worth a moment’s consideration. When their fault is condoned, they take the first opportu-

nity to repeat it, and so it goes on, to the lasting misery of everyone connected with them."

"Do not speak so bitterly, mother; I like better to see your face when it is lighted up by the sweet smile that has always greeted me since I can remember. True, the promises of the erring are often broken, for human nature is weak, and habits once formed link their fetters of steel with relentless power around their deluded victim; but sometimes a man's eyes are so clearly opened to see the error of his ways that no amount of persuasion can induce him to return to them again. I believe it was so with father; in fact, I have convincing proof of it."

"You are too sanguine, Henry. What has become of your father I know not; but I presume he has sunk lower and lower down the scale of degradation, if he still lives. What do you mean by 'convincing proof?'"

"Mother, I know where father is—I found out yesterday in town. And he's a steady, industrious man—I'm sure of it. Where's my coat—the breast pocket—you'll find a clipping; read it."

"Mr. James H. Mellen, our popular postmaster, reports that the business of his office during the quarter ending September 30th exceeds that of any other quarter since he has been in charge. It will be remembered that Mr. Mellen was appointed to the

postmastership nearly eight years ago, not long after his arrival in Daturah from Sonoma, Cal."

"I saw that in an Iowa paper, mother; and you know that father went to Sonoma. This must be father, and you see he is popular and occupies a good position. Now will you write to him, mother?"

"Can it be possible? It seems likely, and yet I fear there is some mistake. Would that he *were* again a useful and respected member of society. But, even then, my son, I could not write to him after all these years. He would not care to hear from me."

"Try him, mother."

"Perhaps he has—another—family."

"I do not believe it, mother."

"Divorces are easy to get now-a-days, and he could say I deserted him."

"I don't think he did, mother; write and see. Tell him where you are; tell him your boy is ——."

"Oh, Henry, Henry, don't, don't say it! I'll do as you wish, darling, if it will make your mind easier, I'll forgive and forget, and he shall answer me or not, as he pleases. If some other woman is making him happy, I will not repine. My son's last moments shall not be worried by obstinacy of mine."

"That's my own dear mother! And—one thing more—you love him a little yet, do you not?"

"Henry, if he be true and worthy, never would

wife be more tender than I if our paths, so long estranged, should unite again."

"Then write—write, now—don't wait!"

Without another word the mother left her son's bedside to comply with his request. Henry Mellen, but twenty-four hours ago in the vigorous health of early manhood, lay helpless upon the couch from which he would never rise. Delayed longer than usual in the neighboring town of Kellyville, whither he had gone with a load of wood to sell, he had thought to gain time by returning on a different road—a shorter cut, but having a steep, winding grade, in places so narrow, where it had been cut from the hill-side, that it was impossible for teams to pass each other, and a slight swerving from the road would inevitably precipitate anyone from fifty to one hundred feet down the bank. Henry had been over this road countless times, and, like all Californians accustomed to rough travel, had never apprehended danger; but darkness came on before he reached the grade, coupled with a thick fog, so that he found it difficult to distinguish the pathway before him. Regretting that he had not taken the longer circuit, as the fog settled around him, he reflected that the chances were nine to ten that he would meet no one coming up the grade at that hour, the horses knew the road well, and would take him safely to the valley

below. All went well until the last curve but one was rounded, when the horses stumbled over an obstruction, the wagon tipped abruptly to one side, there was a scramble, a frantic effort to keep the track, and then the wagon, horses, and, alas, poor Henry Mellen, went crashing down the hillside.

There they were found some hours later, when the mother, alarmed at the prolonged absence of her son, had aroused the neighbors and a search had been instituted. Mrs. Mellen's first thought had been of the grade, as Henry had on several other occasions laughed at her fears and taken the shorter road, and thither the steps of the men were directed.

They soon discovered that a landslide had taken place, partially blocking the road, and their worst anticipations were realized by the evidences of the accident that had taken place.

One horse was killed and the other so badly hurt that he was speedily put out of his misery. Henry was found to have received fatal spinal injuries. He suffered little, but his hours were numbered. It was after the doctor had candidly stated the facts of the case that the foregoing conversation between mother and son took place.

The letter was written. Mrs. Mellen enclosed the newspaper clipping, and said that if the postmaster referred to was her husband of years ago, she

congratulated him on his honorable career, which had gained him the esteem of his townspeople, and sincerely regretted the harsh words which would have driven a weaker man to moral destruction. Their boy was dying, and by his bedside she implored his forgiveness for all her shortcomings as she freely forgave the wrongdoing which had been the cause of their separation.

Henry listened to the letter, a smile of content creeping over his white face, and his last words were full of confidence that happiness was yet in store for his estranged parents.

It was early in December when he died. One perfect day followed another with a prodigality unknown in the East. The occasional gentle showers revivified the earth until it put on a garb of freshest verdure. Dainty blossoms of every hue sprang up on the broad plains, all over the hills, in every nook and corner. The birds caroled their sweetest lays like those of spring time—for was not this the California spring?

Christmas day dawned—the beautiful Christmas so unlike that of which the poets sing; and in the home of Henry Mellen's mother there was much sadness and little rejoicing. The weary shoulders were not quite fitted to the burden yet, but they were making a brave effort to shape themselves, and every day

the sad lips murmured: “Thy will, not mine, be done.”

Who is this walking so swiftly up the path and knocking so imperatively upon the door? A tall figure, a bearded face, the hair thickly streaked with gray, that sends a strange thrill over the breathless watcher. She can scarcely throw open the door; but she is in no danger of falling, for strong arms support her, warm kisses are pressed upon lips and brow, a fond voice whispers, “My wife! My precious wife at last!”

“Peace on earth! good will to men!” Did angels ever bequeath to mortals a sweeter motto? Not alone for remembrance on the blessed anniversary of our Saviour’s birth, but for constant use amid the trials and perplexities of every-day life.

“I tried to find you,” said Mr. Mellen, “after I was certain that the old temptation had no power over me; but you had vanished, leaving no trace of your whereabouts. Then I went East, feeling that I had but one thing to live for, and that was to retrieve my lost reputation. I have succeeded, and by the memory of that dear son who so nobly strove to fill the place I left vacant, I solemnly vow that nothing shall henceforth be left undone that will in any degree atone for the suffering I have caused you. Be comforted, dear wife, you are not left alone.”

“O blessed day, which gives the eternal lie
To self and sense, and all the brute within !
Oh ! come to us amid this war of life ;
To hall and hovel, come ; to all who toil
In senate, shop or study, and to those
Who, sundered by the wastes of half a world,
Ill-warmed and sorely tempted, ever face
Nature’s brute powers, and men unmanned to brutes,
Come to them, blest and blessing, Christmas day.
Tell them once more the tale of Bethlehem,
The kneeling shepherds and the Babe divine,
And keep them men indeed, fair Christmas Day.”



THAT UGLY MAN.

"HOW came such a beautiful woman to marry that ugly man," exclaimed a stranger in the city, as the wedding party came from the church.

"Because she knows what real beauty is," said a gentle faced old lady as she passed.

I knew the story. I knew Salome Marden when she married at 18 a man who had more than his share of personal graces, and I knew what a life she led for the next fifteen years—not necessarily because she had married a handsome man, but because in his case beauty was only "skin deep." She had an inkling of the fact once when, for a trifling fault, he unmercifully lashed the horse that he was driving. It jarred upon her seriously, but could she break an engagement for a little thing like that? She had yet to learn that a cruel, unreasonable temper can destroy the happiness of a home. She also discovered that her handsome husband was too much engrossed with himself to take any interest in her pursuits. On her experience I will not dwell. The martyrdom of a

neglected, ill-treated wife is far more common than the world realizes.

After Salome became a widow, she had no lack of admirers. A few had some attraction for her at first, then a chance act or word would dispel her illusion. Warned by the past, she took heed when Mr. Prince sneered at a ragged old woman, and Mr. Means kicked an injured dog which had crawled to his feet, and Mr. Sterne could not see the sense of fussing over flowers or reading poetry, and Mr. Pomosity thought that women were getting so that they knew too much, and Mr. Gayfair occassionally took too much wine.

One Sunday morning, as she took her seat in church, she caught sight of the ugliest little man, positively the very ugliest, she thought, that she had ever set eyes on. He was short, and red faced and bald-headed, and had a turned-up nose, and a big mouth and scraggly red whiskers. He sat in the seat directly behind her, and her first feeling was one of thankfulness that he did not sit in front of her. By and bye she noticed that he joined in the hymns with a hearty bass voice, and he actually said the Lord's prayer right out loud at the proper time in the service. Salome had not been accustomed to hearing a man pray. She respected the ugly creature from that time forth.

Sunday after Sunday passed ; she was a constant church-goer and so was he. Then he was introduced

to her at "a social," and real acquaintance began. She found that he was even more of a reader than herself, that his sympathies were quick, his perceptions delicate. She liked the manly ring in his voice and the strong grasp of his hand. His almost diffident courtesy was a change from the self-assured attentions of the other gentlemen. She was sure that he knew how ugly he was and that his unattractive appearance deprived him of much of life's pleasure. He must be forty, yet had never been married.

"Young girls are so foolish," she thought, recalling how she, as well as others, had reserved all her smiles for the best-looking young men, and more than once had snubbed some freckle-faced youth without regard for his good qualities.

It was rather a lively winter among the church people, and Salome often met Mr. Hartwell. He seemed to take great pleasure in her society, but always maintained a certain reserve. Salome discerned that the nature of this plain little man was not one to be fathomed readily.

One evening he escorted her home from a meeting of the literary club. Almost at her doorstep she slipped on a banana peel, turned her ankle, and for an instant lost consciousness with the pain. What woman could faint long within a pair of embracing arms, with a warm kiss clinging to her lips? Not

Salome Marden at any rate. Her astonishment brought her to her senses, and in another moment she was standing very straight and Mr. Hartwell was stammering an apology.

" You were falling—I caught you—and—and I lost my self-control. Can you forgive me?" Without waiting for an answer, he went on as if the flood-gates were opened. He told her how hopelessly he had loved her, how well he knew that no woman could ever marry him ; that he never meant to show his affection, but was grateful for her friendship.

Something shone in his face that was better than beauty of features. Salome wondered how she could ever have looked with pity upon this man.

" Will you come in a minute ? " she asked.

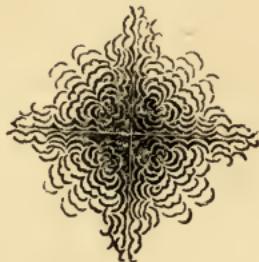
Uncertain of her mood, he followed her up the steps.

She turned as they passed through the parlor door.

" You said that no woman could ever marry you, Mr. Hartwell. You must take that back, for—I can. I want to be happy," and she laid her arms about his neck.

That kiss had made things clear. Somehow it was not quite like any other kiss she had ever received, and Salome felt that it was what she had been wanting all her life. She forgot all about her

aching ankle. Mr. Hartwell's emotions need not be described, but I will say this: If there is a blissful wedded couple in the universe, "that ugly man" and his beautiful Salome are the identical pair.



THE AWAKENING.

RETTA RICHARDSON turned from the one window of her little sitting room with a sigh. It was not an entrancing or even interesting scene that she had viewed as she stood between the simple muslin curtains that were caught back on each side by an artistically knotted band of broad blue ribbon.

A dusty, cobbly street, lined with small, low, unpainted frame houses, guiltless of the slightest attempt toward ornament—structures appearing but half finished to one accustomed to eastern architecture. Beyond the street, more dirt, more cobble stones, more Liliputian houses, then along, wide stretch of barren *mesa*, extending far out to the horizon line, and broken by a rugged mountain range that rose precipitously from the surface of the plain, some ten miles away. Ten miles, although it did not look half the distance, in the clear, rarefied atmosphere of southern Arizona; and many more miles the eye scanned in vain for a glimpse of beauty,—for one tree to relieve the monotony, for a tiny rivulet or a sparkling lake. Bare, dust-colored *mesa*, distant

mountains, and deep blue sky over all these, formed the panorama.

But this unprepossessing exterior was not the cause of Retta's sigh, although she had been thinking of the dear old home in New England,—of the verdant country town where she was born and bred, and of the roomy, comfortable dwelling of her youthful days, all so great a contrast to her present surroundings.

The little room in which she stood, though cheaply furnished, was a cosy apartment, with its tasteful arrangement and pretty devices. The sigh issued again from her lips as she looked toward a lounge at one side, whereon the greatest ornament of all reclined,—a handsome man,—her husband,—her own. Tall and athletic in figure, nobly modeled in feature, his wavy brown locks carelessly lying upon the neatly embroidered pillow, his large dark eyes closed in slumber. A picture to fill a fond wife's heart with joyous pride, yet tears gathered in Retta's eyes as she gazed, and she bit her lips in an attempt to control her emotion.

A loud, stentorous breathing came from under the heavy moustache, unlike the respiration of natural slumber. Retta's cherished husband was drunk, and not for the first time.

She could bear separation from the loved rela-

tions, banishment from congenial scenes, and the privations and annoyances of frontier life; but this crowning grievance was almost more than she could endure.

She had, at first, hopefully imagined that she could influence Myron to overcome the temptation; but she had tried every means in her power and they had proved of no avail. He had started out in business in a small way, hoping to prosper with the growth of the bustling little town, and for a time had done well. But he had succumbed to the degenerating influences that are so plentiful in newly settled communities, far from the haunts of a higher state of civilization, and now both he and the business seemed fairly on the road to ruin. No wonder that Retta's tender, lonely heart contracted with anguish, and her courage well-nigh failed her.

The next morning, when Myron had recovered from the dissipation of the previous day, a day set aside by the rougher elements of the population for excessive indulgence,—the holy Sabbath—Retta tried once more to reason with him. Not argumentatively, not harshly; but gently, lovingly, fervently. Once Myron had been plunged into depths of shame and remorse at the consciousness that he had allowed liquor to master him,—had sworn it should never happen again, that she need not worry, everything

would be all right in the future, as men are sure to swear who falsely gauge their own strength and the entralling power of drink. All that was past now, as it inevitably becomes in the case of a pampered appetite. Myron was moody and irritable now, after a debauch, and impatient of any interference from his wife.

He swallowed his strong coffee this morning with a clouded brow, scarcely vouching a word to Retta, who sat opposite him, the same pretty, blue-eyed little woman who had once captivated his heart, and who had been cherished as the apple of his eye before the demon drink became her rival.

"You'll be home to dinner at five, won't you, Myron?" pleaded Retta, knowing it was useless to ask him to come to lunch, for it had been some months now since he had asserted that the pressure of his business required him to take lunch at a restaurant near the store.

"I suppose so," Myron replied, rather ungraciously.

"And need you go back, dear?"

Retta was leaning over her husband's chair now, her arms about his neck.

"Stay at home with me tonight, and let us read and talk together as we used."

"Bosh!" exclaimed Myron. "That would be

dull work. How often must I tell you, Retta, that a man can't spend all his days courting? That time is past and gone for us, and it is very unreasonable of you to be so exacting. I've something else to do beside moping around in the house."

How different his tones were from the seductive eloquence of that voice not so many years ago! And this plea of urgent business, which had so often been advanced as an excuse for remaining away until the evening was far spent, if not entirely gone. Retta had worried, at first, about such overwork, but had finally made the discovery that these evenings were mostly spent in some one of the numerous attractively furnished gambling saloons.

"Oh, now, dear, don't talk that way. It pains me to hear you say that your wife is dull company. You used not to think so."

"Hang it all, there you go again! 'You used not' this, and 'you used not' that! Do you suppose the world, and everything on it, is going to hang stationary? I 'used not' to be tied to a woman's apron string, and I don't propose to be now."

Oh, favorite expression of a tyrannical man! How many times a loving wife's heart has been wrung by it.

Myron rose from the table, clapped his hat upon his head, and strode into the street without a back-

ward glance or a word of farewell. It was not much past five when he returned, and he was sober.

But he was off again in an hour, despite his wife's persuasions, and she saw no more of him until nearly midnight, when he was not so sober.

It was extremely hot weather,—one scorching, cloudless day followed another, with the mercury over 100 deg. in the shade,—and Retta, never very strong, was much reduced by the excessive heat, combined with her ever-present anxiety. Day by day, she grew whiter and thinner, until even Myron observed her wan appearance, and betrayed some feeling in regard to it.

"You ought to have a change, Retta," he declared. "This infernally hot weather is too much for you,—it is rather rough on me sometimes,—and you ought to go into the mountains. There are parties going every little while, and you 'd better join one of them."

The doctor said so, too, and added that she must go somewhere, or she would be down entirely. His positive tones admitted of no incredulity, and Retta, who shrank from the thought of an illness in that inauspicious climate, and felt that, for Myron's sake, she must keep up, at last consented to take a trip to the Chiricahuas. She would have gone readily and with pleasure if Myron could have accompanied her;

but she felt very uneasy about leaving him perfectly free to follow the bent of his inclinations, and was sorely afraid that he would take advantage of her absence in a way that would be detrimental to him.

"Promise me that you will be good," she entreated, as she took leave of him. "Do not forget that you are a gentleman, and that your business prospects and our future happiness depend upon your conduct. Oh, be good and true, darling."

Her voice broke into a sob, as she clung to him.

"Nonsense!" and he kissed her lightly. "What a pucker about nothing! One would think I was in danger of an arrant disgrace, and that you were about to take your departure for Borrioboola Gha, or some other place at the antipodes, instead of for a cañon in the Chiricahuas, but sixty miles away. Don't fret about me, Retta, but devote yourself to getting well, among the trees and flowers and singing birds. There comes the carriage. I shall expect to see you as dusky as a señorita in a month from now. Enjoy yourself all you can. Good-by."

He parted from her more like his old self than usual, but Retta's heart was heavy as she rode away in the bright sunlight.

Myron went back to the store rejoicing that he was free from surveillance for a whole month. He didn't intend to do anything very much out of the

way, but Retta was too straight-faced. If she had her way she wouldn't allow a man any liberties at all. Things were different in mining-camps from what they were in puritanical New England. A man could enjoy a game of faro without anything being thought of it, and it would be quite out of the ordinary course to refuse a glass of liquor. So Myron Richardson followed the advice he had given his wife, and "enjoyed himself." If he lost heavily at his favorite game, there was no one to reproach him, and if he sometimes took "a glass too much," there were no sorrowful eyes to see it. Some few friends, who were proof against the temptations of border life, remarked that it was a pity that such a fine man as Myron Richardson should be going down hill, and it was hard lines for that lady-like little wife of his. But Myron felt no twinges of conscience. He grew better satisfied with himself all the time. And now it was about time for his wife to return. In fact, she was liable to arrive in the camp any day. He had no means of hearing directly from her, but he knew that the party whom she had accompanied proposed to return about this time.

One quiet Sunday morning,—come to think of it, it was not so very quiet, either, for Sunday is not observed as punctiliously in mining camps as it is in the East, and the stamp mills were pounding away as usual on the daily supply of ore,—but one peace-

ful Sunday morning, the residents of Bonanza were suddenly thrown into a state of the wildest commotion. Rumors of an Apache outbreak at the San Carlos reservation had been afloat for a day or two, but had not been generally credited, similar sensational reports having proved utterly without foundation several times heretofore. But when two excited, roughly-dressed men galloped into town, on horses that were literally covered with foam, and spread the tidings that a party of four woodchoppers in the Dragon Mountains had been found murdered by a band of fleeing Indians, *en route* to Sonoro, who had stolen large numbers of horses, mules and cattle, and had marked their trail from the reservation with the blood of at least forty white men, women and children at various points, the outbreak was recognized as a terrible fact. The bearers of the dread intelligence had feared for their lives in crossing the mesa between the Dragons and Bonanza, but had luckily caught only a distant view of the motley band of savages. The Indians were apparently making for the lower end of the Chiricahuas, and woe betide any white people who might be crossing the Sulphur-Spring Valley, between that range and the Dragons, unconscious of the proximity of the red foe.

At once the town was aroused. The whistles of the steam hoisting works sounded a shrill alarm, fast

and furious, which thronged the streets with excited, curious people. Stern-faced men hastily saddled their horses, buckled on their cartridge belts and a brace of revolvers, and, taking their rifles before them, galloped up and down the streets, recruiting a force to go in pursuit of the renegades, and to notify the surrounding settlers of their danger. No doubt the soldiers were not very far distant, but perhaps a volunteer company from Bonanza could cut off the retreat of the Indians into Mexican territory. The bodies of their victims must be brought into town also, and decently buried. All was bustle and prompt action. Within an hour after the news was received, fifty mounted men rode out in the direction indicated as taken by the savages, and twenty more took a circuit among the ranches, and other exposed places, to warn the people of the danger of their situation.

Myron Richardson's first thought was of Retta. She was liable to be on the road from the Chiricahuas, and directly in the path of the hostiles. Good God! she might be killed, or worse yet, be taken into a terrible captivity! And he could do nothing to avert the danger. Even now, the horrible deed might be committed! How was he to endure such suspense? Why had he allowed her to go into such a lonely country without him? A country, too, supporting in

its midst that constant menace of an Apache reservation. Now that Retta's life was in jeopardy, it seemed very precious to the husband who had manifested so much indifference for months past. He was almost unmanned at the thought that she might be snatched from him, in this cruelest of ways. Something very like a prayer rose from his heart to heaven, as he wandered aimlessly through the streets, now more than usually lively, heeding no familiar faces, intent only on the all-absorbing question that none could answer—was Retta safe? He had not long to wait for news of her.

Ere the sun had commenced its downward journey toward the west, another flying horseman reached the camp, and the tidings he brought were of a nature to fill strong men's eyes with tears, and their hearts with horror unutterable.

Some men had arrived at Jones' ranch just before his departure, so the messenger said, who reported that a train of freight wagons had been "taken in" by the Indians, in the Sulphur-Spring Valley, the drivers (Mexicans) killed, and the mules stolen. A party of Bonanza people, who had been camping in the Chiricahuas and were on their way home, had also been attacked. Not one had escaped. All lay cold in death, brutally hacked and mutilated by the blood-thirsty Apaches. The description of the bodies found

tailed exactly with that of the Whitcomb party, of which Mrs. Richardson was a member.

This fresh and trebly sickening horror spread like wildfire through the streets, and was not long in reaching Myron Richardson. Although he had thought of nothing else since he had heard that the Apaches were in the vicinity, he was completely staggered by the awful confirmation of his fears. A great wave of misery rolled over him with the knowledge, for there could be little doubt of it, that poor Retta lay lifeless and disfigured, exposed to the burning rays of the sun, in Sulphur-Spring Valley. Mechanically, with set lips and staring eyes, he sought his home, oblivious of the exclamations of pity from his acquaintances that followed the sight of his agonized countenance. He entered the humble home which Retta had made so attractive, turned the key in the door, and threw himself down by the table, dropping his head upon his arms, to think it out. Retta was no more! never again would he behold the sweet face that had smiled for him since that blessed day six years ago when his eyes had first rested upon it. Never again would he hear her gentle voice assuring him of her tender love, or—O wretched thought!—entreating him to give up his unsteady habits, and be to her the loving, considerate husband of yore. And now a great storm of remorse-

ful anguish shook Myron's frame from head to foot. Was it not hard enough to lose his precious wife, in this diabolical manner, without suffering the woe of unavailing regret for the past, brought about entirely by his own selfishness and disregard of principles?

The unhappy man groaned in agony of spirit, and lay motionless, fighting with his grief, while the day wore on, and night drew near. All the torturing thoughts that filled his brain, only he and his Maker knew.

We can imagine them to some extent, but only those who have passed through such an ordeal can fully realize the pain of a conscience-stricken mourner.

Hours had passed when Myron started up from his chair, invincible determination written upon every lineament, and, raising his hand on high, he exclaimed,—

“I will throw off the shackles. As God hears me, I will be a different man. I cannot bring my darling back, I cannot live my life over and fulfill the vows I made her at the alter,—O God would that I could,—but I can do what she would wish me to do if she could speak to me. I will never touch liquor or dice again, no, never, never, never!”

Myron trembled with agitation, cold beads of perspiration stood upon his brow, and tears filled his

eyes, as he continued, "I see it all now,—my damnable conduct. With the dearest, truest wife in the world, I have been blind to her happiness and my own interests. I have caused her untold suffering,—I know it,—and God is just in taking away from me a blessing that I did not appreciate. Oh, idiot that I have been!"

Pacing nervously to and fro, Myron thought of the lonely, loveless life before him. He was firm in his resolve to break loose from all degrading associations, but it occurred to him that, if he registered his solemn vow on paper, it would be an ever-present reminder of the pledge.

"I will put it down in black and white," he said, "and it shall never leave my body."

So he drew out a little drawer in the table, wherein his wife had kept her writing materials, and rummaged among its contents for a suitable paper. The sight of letters inscribed with her dear name, and a glimpse now and then of her familiar handwriting, almost overpowered him. He caught sight of the wished-for paper, and drew it out from beneath a pile of envelopes. Another sheet came with it,—a jagged, torn leaf, apparently from an account book or diary,—and it was covered with Retta's dainty chirography. Instinctively he began to read. Soon he flushed and choked, and, when he had finished, the leaf fell from

his nerveless hand, his head dropped, and he groaned. “Oh, wretched man that I am ! May God forgive me for my cruelty to that sainted woman.”

This is what he read :

“I must tell my grief to some one or something. This continual repression is killing me. So let me pour my trouble out on the bosom of my diary, since I can confide it to no human breast. How can I look calmly on and see my darling husband going to ruin ? How can I bear his indifference, his hard words, his utter disregard of my counsel ? O Myron, Myron, if you but knew that a wife’s affection is beyond all price ! If you but realized your precarious condition, and the duty you owe to yourself, to me, and to your God ! Night and day I pray for thee, and night and day my heart aches, oh, so bitterly. I am alone, alone in this desolate country, for the staff on which I leaned has failed me. My father in heaven, help me to endure.”

It was like a message from the dead to Myron, and it filled his heart with anguish. The room grew dusk, but he did not move. A man could not live in such misery, he dully thought.

He did not hear some one try the door, which was still locked, nor did he notice the light steps that passed around the side of the house to the kitchen entrance.

“Myron,” a soft voice spoke, “Myron, are you here ?”

The man started as if struck by an electric shock,

and looked up. Standing just within the room, and bending forward to peer into the gathering darkness, was a figure strangely like Retta's. Was she come back to reproach him for his cruelty?

"Surely that is you over there in the chair," the voice continued, and the figure came nearer, "but it is so dark that I can't half see."

Those matter-of-fact tones, that tangible shape—they could not belong to a denizen of the spirit world. Could it be Retta herself? Retta, alive and unharmed? Just as Myron asked himself this question, while he still stared vacantly at the advancing figure, a hand was laid upon his shoulder—a warm, flesh and blood hand—and Myron, filled with a sudden ecstatic happiness, caught his wife to his breast, as she exclaimed:

"You dear boy! Why don't you speak to me?"

For a few moments he could not command his voice. He could only hold Retta in a close embrace, and shower kisses upon her brow and cheek and lips, while his frame shook with emotion.

And she, touched and surprised by his unwonted demonstrativeness, freely returned his endearments.

"Then you were not killed by the Indians?" at last he ejaculated.

"Killed by the Indians? No, indeed. Did you think so? Oh, my dear boy!"

“Was not the Whitcomb party attacked?”

“Mercy, I hope not; but I don’t know, for I did not come with them.”

“Not come with them?” and Myron gazed in astonishment.

“No. I was intending to, up to the first minute, but we met your friend, George Norcross, and his wife and sister, who had been out to Tres Alamos, and affected a change. You see he was obliged to go to the Turquoise district, on business, on the way back to Bonanza, and you know I have often expressed a wish to see that camp, so, as his wife had been there several times, and was a great crony of Mrs. Whitcomb’s, she said she had much rather take my place with them, and I got into the buggy with him and Louise.”

“And didn’t you see any Indians?”

“Not one, and we didn’t know there was an outbreak until we got to Turquoise. A messenger had just informed the miners of it. We thought we had better get back to Bonanza as quickly as we could, and we kept our eyes open on the way, I can tell you. But, as you see, we arrived here in safety. George drove right to the house and set me down.”

She evidently had heard nothing of the massacre, so Myron broke the intelligence to her, adding that

it was just possible it might be some other party, but not probable.

Nor was it. The next day the mutilated bodies of the Whitcombs and their friends were brought into Bonanza, and the hearts of the populace were filled with commiseration and indignation at the sad spectacle,—the devilish work of the craftiest and cruelist of savages. How long,—was the appeal of every heart,—how long must we endure this murderous race in our midst? How long will they be gathered together, in the heart of our territory, clothed and nurtured, provided with arms and ammunition, and let loose upon the unsuspecting people,—only to be taken back and forgiven, until the bloody tragedy is enacted over again?

The casual change described by Retta saved her life, and made Captain Norcross an unhappy widower. Retta had the supreme pleasure of seeing her husband boldly write down his unalterable determination to abstain henceforth from intoxicating drinks and the gaming table. Myron never forgot that terrible day when he awoke to the consciousness of his peril,—the day when he believed that all that really made life worth living had been taken from him. It was not an easy task that he had set himself. But thoughts of the dear ones at home, and of the gift of God that was coming to him, kept him steadfast.

When their little son was born, Retta felt no shame for its father, and its innocent young life proved an effectual safeguard to the man who found sobriety more pleasurable, and dissipation more repulsive, as time passed on.

The renegades were not captured, either by the soldiers or the volunteers. They made good their escape across the border, where they ensconced themselves in strongholds among the mountains, indulging occasionally in the diversion of a raid upon the scattered settlers of Sonora.



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